

De l'importance des opinions By M. Necker.


“THE offering here made at the shrine of religion, by a man of business, a man of true political wisdom, and a man of the world, in the city of Paris, is a curious phenomenon.—It is also a noble one—and gives M. Necker, who has been long esteemed for his great capacity, literary merit, and eminent virtues, a new and distinguished title to the veneration of the public. It has been this virtuous man’s destiny to arrive at eminence in every line that he has pursued, from the counting house to the threshold of the cabinet. And it is impossible, if we read the work before us with candour and attention, not to see that both his head and his heart make a distinguished and affecting appearance in the cause of religion.

“When Cicero was exhausted with business, and distressed by malignant opposition, in his zealous labours for the good of his country, he had recourse to philosophy, not only for his own consolation, but as adapted to furnish him with means of being useful to his fellow-citizens, which the malice of his enemies could not defeat. Similar to that of the illustrious Roman, is the case of M. Necker, with this advantageous difference, that the latter has found in the doctrines, views and precepts of christianity, better lights by which he might improve his philosophy, than the former could derive from the ambiguous tenets and clouded prospects of heathen wisdom.

“M. Necker shews, with great sagacity and strength of reasoning, the insufficiency of political principles, to answer the purposes they are designed to serve. Religion, which extends its influence distributively to each individual, in sources of consolation,

in incentives to hope, in motives to all the virtues that promote order, and yield satisfaction in every sphere, age, and situation, tends not in a vague, but in a direct and effectual manner, to the advancement of public and private felicity. This most important truth is presented by M. Necker to the understanding and to the heart of his reader in various points of view, which give us *high and pleasing ideas of his own intellects and feelings.*

“ Besides crimes committed in secret, our ingenious and respectable author presents us with a prodigious list of errors and vices, which civil laws can neither define nor pursue—and which have already done unspeakable mischief in society, even before they have become the objects of public censure. The details here are singularly ingenious and solid, and shew a deep and extensive knowledge of human nature and human life. The parallel, moreover, drawn by M. Necker, between the influence of religious sentiments, and that of laws and public opinion, is *interesting in the highest degree.*

“ A kind of enthusiasm animates the author in many passages of these excellent chapters—and which, associated with sober and solid argument, is diffused in a proper measure through the whole of this work: but it is that kind of enthusiasm, which an elevated and enlightened mind must feel in the contemplation of what is great, beautiful, and happy.

“ Those who can peruse the 18th and last chapter of this book without a pleasing emotion, and the warmest sentiments of esteem for the Author, will, we hope, be few in number.”

Extract from the same work, vol. 80, page 370.

“ We rejoice to see *this excellent work* naturalized here—and it ought to be translated into every European language.”

OF THE
IMPORTANCE
OF
RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

OF
MR. NECKER.

— K



PHILADELPHIA:
FROM THE PRESS OF CAREY, STEWART & CO.

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REPORT

REPORT



FROM THE LIBRARY OF THE
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INTRODUCTION.

MY thoughts having been detached from the study and disquisition of those truths which have the political good of the state for their object; and being no longer obliged to fix any attention on those particular arrangements of the public interest, which are necessarily connected with the operations of government; I found myself abandoned, as it were, by all the important concerns of life. Restless and wandering in this kind of void, my soul, still active, felt the want of employment. I sometimes formed the design of tracing my ideas of men and characters; I imagined that long experience in the midst of those active scenes which discover the passions, had taught me to know them well; but elevating my views, my heart was filled with a different ambition, and with a desire to reconcile the sublimest thoughts with those meditations from which I was constrained to withdraw myself. Guided by this sentiment, I remarked, with satisfaction, that there existed a natural connexion between the different truths which contribute to the happiness of mankind. Our prejudices and our passions frequently attempt to disunite them; but to the eye of an attentive observer, they have all one common origin. From a similar affinity, the general views of administration, the spirit of laws, morality, and religious opinions, are closely connected; and it is by carefully preserving an alliance so beautiful, that we

raise a rampart round those works, which are destined for the prosperity of states and the tranquillity of nations.

One could not have taken an active part in the administration of public affairs—or made it the object of stedfast attention; one could not have compared the several relations of this great whole, with the natural dispositions of minds and characters; nor indeed observed men in a perpetual state of rivalry and competition, without perceiving how much the wisest governments need support from the influence of that invisible spring which acts in secret on the consciences of individuals. Thus whilst I am endeavouring to form some reflexions on the importance of religious opinions, I am not so far removed from my former habit of thinking, as may, at the first glance, be imagined; and as, in writing on the management of finances, I omitted no argument to prove that there is an intimate connexion between the efficacy of governments, and the wisdom with which they are conducted; between the virtue of princes, and the confidence of their subjects; I think I am still proceeding in the same train of sentiment and reflexion, when, struck with that spirit of indifference which is so general, I endeavour to refer the duties of men to those principles which afford them the most natural support.

After having studied the interests of a great nation, and run over the circle of our political societies, we approach nearer perhaps to those sublime ideas which bind the general structure of mankind to that infinite and Almighty Being, who is the first grand cause of all, and universal mover of the universe. In the rapid course of an active administration, indeed, one cannot indulge similar reflexions; but they are forming and preparing themselves in the midst of the

tumult of business ; and the tranquillity of retirement enables us to strengthen and extend them.

The calm which succeeds hurry and confusion, seems the season most favourable to meditation ; and if any remembrance, or retrospective views of what is past should inspire you with a kind of melancholy, you will be involuntarily led back to contemplations which border on those ideas with which you have been long conversant. It is thus the mariner, after having renounced the dangers of the sea, sometimes seats himself on the beach, and there, a more tranquil observer, considers attentively the boundless ocean, the regular succession of the waves, the impression of the winds, the flux and reflux of the tide, and that magnificent firmament, where, during the night, among lights innumerable, he distinguishes the lucid point, which serves as a guide to the navigators.

It is in vain, in those high stations under government, to interest yourself about the happiness of mankind in general ; it is in vain, that, penetrated with a just respect for the important duties of office, a public character shall dare to take in hand the cause of the people, and incessantly apply himself to the defence of the weak, in opposition to the attacks of the powerful. He soon perceives how bounded are his abilities, and how limited are those, even of sovereignty itself. Pity for the distresses of the individual is checked by the law of civil rights ; benevolence, by justice ; and liberty, by its own abuses : you perpetually behold merit struggling with patronage—honour with fortune—and patriotism with the interest of the individual. There is no such thing as real disinterestedness in the passions, only by fits and starts. Unless great circumstances, or vigorous virtue in an administration, forcibly renewed the

idea of public good, a general language would take place in every mind; and society itself would appear one confused mass of opposite interests, which the supreme authority keeps within bounds for the maintenance of peace, without any inquietude about real harmony, or any revolution favourable to the manners or happiness of the public.

From the midst of these clashings and contradictions, continually recurring, a minister, possessed of a reflecting mind, is incessantly called back to the idea of imperfection. He will, undoubtedly, be sorry, when he sees the great disproportion which exists between his duty and his powers: and he will sometimes grieve and be discouraged, at perceiving the obstacles he must surmount, and the difficulties he must overcome. He raises, with labour and care, banks on the strand; the waters swell; their course becomes more rapid; and the first precautions rendered insufficient, oblige him to have recourse to new works, which, thrown down in their turn, hurry on a continued succession of fruitless toil and useless attempts. What, then, would be the consequence, if once the salutary chain of religious sentiments were broken? What would be the event, if the action of that powerful spring were ever entirely destroyed? You would soon see every part of the social structure tremble from its foundation—and the hand of government unable to sustain the vast and tottering edifice.

The sovereign, and the laws which are the interpreters of his wisdom, should have two grand objects, the maintenance of public order, and the increase of private happiness. But to accomplish both, the aid of religion is absolutely necessary. The sovereign cannot influence the happiness of individuals, but by a general solicitude; because the sentiments, which

Spring from the different characters of men, or merely from the circumstances of their respective situations, are independent of him. Neither can he insure the preservation of public order, but by rules and institutions, which are only applicable to actions, and those actions positively proved. It is necessary, also, that the laws should extend their influence to society in an uniform manner. They should always have a tendency to diminish the number of distinctions, shades, and modifications, that are to be found in the actions of men; in short, to prevent those abuses, inseparably attendant on arbitrary decisions.

Such are the bounds of sovereign authority, and such the necessary developement of its means and powers. Religion, to attain the same ends, employs other motives essentially different: first, it is not in a vague and general manner, that she influences the happiness of mankind; it is by addressing all men individually—by penetrating the heart of every human being, and pouring into it consolation and hope—by presenting to the imagination every thing that can insensibly lead it captive—by taking possession of men's sentiments—by occupying their thoughts—and by availing herself of this dominion over them, to sustain their courage, and to afford them comfort under their afflictions and disappointments. In this manner, religion concurs to maintain good order, by means absolutely distinct from those of government; for she not only governs our actions, but even our sentiments: it is with the errors and inclinations of each man in particular, that she seeks to combat. Religion, in demonstrating the presence of the Deity, on all occasions, however secret, exercises an habitual authority over the consciences of men. She seems to assist them under the perturbations of fear, and yet attends them in their flight. She equally

notices their intentions, projects, and repentance ; and in the method which she takes, seems as undulating and flexible in all her motions, as the empire of the law appears immoveable and constrained.

I should not, at present, extend these reflexions any further : but if religion, in some measure, complete the imperfect work of legislation—if it ought to supply the insufficiency of those means, which government is under the necessity of adopting—the subject I propose to treat of, seems not foreign to those objects of meditation, which the study of administration ought to comprehend.

I well know, that it is impossible to explain the importance of religion, without, at the same time, fixing the attention to the grand truths on which it depends : and you must also frequently touch on many subjects, that are closely connected with the deepest metaphysics. We are, at least, obliged to seek for a defence against those arguments, which sap the foundation of the most necessary opinions—by which the most impassioned sentiments have been discouraged—by which some would reduce man to a vegetable, make the universe the result of chance, and morality a state trick.

As soon as I discovered how far my subject was likely to lead me, I felt myself intimidated : but I could not allow this to be a sufficient reason for relinquishing my undertaking : and since the greater part of the philosophers of the present age are united in opposition to those opinions, which the light of nature seems to have rendered sacred, it is become indispensably necessary, to admit to the combat all that offer ; nay, even to select a champion from the main body of the army, when all the strong ones are already gone over to the camp of the enemy.

There is nothing which seems to engross the attention of mankind more than metaphysical enquiries; for it is by thinking alone they can be fathomed. The light gained by acquired knowledge is, in some measure, lost in those obscure depths, which it is necessary to sound, and that immense space which it is necessary to traverse. Thus, it were better, perhaps, that each should enter by chance into these labyrinths, where the paths, already traced, lead to no one determined point. I have, besides, often observed, that, even for those researches, where the helps of science are most useful, we ought to set a certain value on the particular excursion of each genius, which seeks out for itself a way, and which, indebted to nature alone for its peculiar formation, preserves in its progress a character of its own. It is then, and then only, that we are not invested with the distinguishing marks of slavishness of thinking; but when, by devoting ourselves to reflexion, we coincide with the opinions of others, this conformity has nothing of servility in it, and the marks of imitation are not even recognized.

In vain would man resist the impression of truth; in vain would he defend himself by a ridiculous indifference for ancient opinions; there never could be an idea more worthy to occupy our meditations, there never could be an idea, on which we might be more fully permitted to expatiate, according to our knowledge and penetration, than that sublime one, of a Supreme Being, and the relation we bear to him: an idea, which, though far removed from us by its immensity, every moment strikes the soul with admiration, and inspires the heart with hope.

It appears to me, that there are interests which may be considered as patriotic by intelligent and feeling beings: and while the inhabitants of the

same country, and the subjects of the same prince, employ themselves diligently in one common plan of defence; the citizens of the world ought to be incessantly anxious to give every new and possible support to those exalted opinions, on which the true greatness of their existence is founded, which preserve the imagination from that frightful spectacle of an existence without origin, of action without liberty, and futurity without hope. Thus, after having, as I think, proved myself a citizen of France, by my administration, as well as my writings, I wish to unite myself to a fraternity still more extended—that of the whole human race: it is thus, without dispersing our sentiments, we may be able, nevertheless, to communicate ourselves a great way off, and enlarge in some measure the limits of our circle: glory be to our thinking faculties for it! to that spiritual portion of ourselves, which can take in the past, dart into futurity, and intimately associate itself with the destiny of men of all countries, and of all ages. Without doubt, a veil is thrown over the greater part of those truths, to which our curiosity would willingly attain: but those, which a beneficent God has permitted us to see, are amply sufficient for our guide and instruction; and we cannot, for a continuance, divert our attention, without a species of slothful negligence, and a total indifference to the superior interests of man. How little is every thing, indeed, when put in competition with those meditations, which give to our existence a new extent, and which, in detaching us from the dust of the earth, seem to unite our souls to an infinity of space, and our duration of a day to the eternity of time! Above all, it is for you to determine, who have sensibility—who feel the want of a Supreme Being, and who seek to find in him that support so necessary to

your weakness, that defender and that assurance, without which, painful inquietude will be perpetually tormenting you, and troubling those soft, tender affections which constitute your happiness.

However, I must say, there never, perhaps, was a period, when it was more essentially necessary to recall to the minds of men, the importance of religious sentiments : at present, they are but prejudices, if we may credit the spirit of licentiousness and levity—the laws dictated by fashion ; and more particularly essential, since we have had philosophical instructions, which excite the various deviations of vanity, and rally the wanderings of the imagination.

There is not any form of religion, undoubtedly, to which ideas more or less mystical have not been annexed ; and of which the evidence has not been in proportion to the dictatorial language, and authoritative tone, which has been made use of in teaching and defending it ; as such, one might, at any given period, have been tempted to dispute about particular parts of worship, which different nations have adopted ; but it is principally in the present age, that a certain class of men have sprung up, distinguished for their wit and talents ; and who, intoxicated by the facility with which they have gained a victory, have extended their ambition, and had the daring courage to attack the reserved body of that army, of which the front ranks had already given way.

This struggle between persons, one of whom would imperiously rule by faith alone, whilst the other thinks he has a right to reject with disdain every thing that has not been demonstrated, will always be a fruitless combat ; and only serve to nourish blind aversion and unjust contempt. Some seek to wound their adversaries, others to humble

them : in the mean time, the good of mankind, and the true benefit of society, are absolutely lost sight of : yes, the real love of useful truths, the impartial search after them, and the desire of pointing them out, these sentiments, so amiable and so truly laudable, seem to be entirely unknown. I see, permit me to say it, I see at the two extremities of the arena, the savage inquisitor, and the inconsiderate philosopher. But neither the faggots lighted by the one, nor the derisions of the other, will ever diffuse any salutary instruction : and in the eyes of a rational man, the intolerance of monks adds no more to the dominion of true religious sentiments, than the jests of a few licentious wits have effected a triumph in favour of philosophy.

It is between these opposite opinions, and in the midst of wanderings equally dangerous, that we must attempt to mark out our way : but as all the opinions of men are subject to change—at present, when their minds are more averse to the maxims of intolerance, it is religion itself that principally needs support : and such is the daily diminution of it, that means, supplying the deficiency, seem to be already publicly preparing. For some time past we have heard of nothing but the necessity of composing a moral catechism, in which religious principles should not be introduced, as resources which are now out of date, and which it is time to discard. Without doubt, these principles might be more effectually attacked, could they ever be represented as totally useless for the maintenance of public order ; and if the cold lessons of a political philosophy could be substituted for those sublime ideas, which, by the spiritual tie of religion, bind the heart and mind to the purest morality. Let us now examine, if we should gain any thing by the exchange ; let us see, if the

means they propose to employ, can be put in competition with those which ought to be made use of ; and if they be more solid, and more efficacious : let us see, if this new doctrine, which is recommended, will produce in the soul the same degree of consolation ; if it be calculated for those hearts which are possessed of sensibility ; and above all, let us attentively consider, if it can be suitable to the measure of intelligence, and the social situation of the greater part of mankind. In short, in considering the various questions, which in any manner relate to the important subject we have undertaken to treat, let us not be afraid to resist, as well as we can, the foolish ambition of those, who, availing themselves of the superiority of their understanding, wish to deprive man of his dignity, to place him on a level with the dust under his feet, and make his foresight a punishment : —melancholy and deplorable destiny ! from which, however, we are permitted to seek to defend ourselves. Cruel and disastrous opinion ! which tears up by the roots every thing which surrounds it, which relaxes the most necessary bands, and, in an instant, destroys the most delightful charm of life.

O thou God unknown !—but whose beneficent idea has ever filled my soul, if thou ever throw a look on those efforts which man makes to approach thee, sustain my resolution, enlighten my understanding, raise my thoughts, and reject not the desire I have to unite still more, if possible, the order and happiness of society, with the intimate and perfect conception of thy divinity, and the lively idea of thy sublime existence.

ADVERTISEMENT.

IN rendering this work into English, some liberties have been taken by the translator, which seemed necessary to preserve the spirit of the original.

I NO 61

OF THE
IMPORTANCE
OF
RELIGIOUS OPINIONS.

CHAP. I.

On the connexion of religious principles with public order.

WE know not distinctly the origin of most political societies : but as soon as history exhibits men united in a national body, we perceive, at the same time, the establishment of public worship, and the application of religious sentiments, to the maintenance of good order and subordination. Religious sentiments, by the sanction of an oath, bind the people to the magistrates, and the magistrates to their engagements. They inspire a reverential respect for the obligations contracted between sovereigns ; and these sentiments, still more authoritative than discipline, attach the soldier to his commander. In short, religious opinions, by their influence on the manners of individuals, have produced an infinite number of illustrious actions and instances of heroic disinterestedness, of which history has transmitted us the remembrance. But as we have seen a philosophy spring up among nations the most enlightened, anxiously employed in depriving religion of all that merited respect, dissertations on times far removed from us, and the various systems that they would endeavour violently to associate with religion, would become an endless source of controversy. It

is, then, by reasoning alone, by that exercise of the mind, which belongs equally to all countries and all ages, that we can support the cause which we have taken in hand to defend. There is, perhaps, something weak and servile in our wishing to draw assistance from ancient opinions. Reason ought not, like vanity, to adorn herself with old parchments, and the display of a genealogical tree. More dignified in her proceeding, and proud of her immortal nature, she ought to derive every thing from herself; she should disregard past times, and be, if I may use the phrase, the cotemporary of all ages.

It was reserved, particularly for some writers of our age, to attack even the utility of religion; and to seek to substitute, instead of its active influence, the inanimate instruction of a political philosophy. Religion, say they, is a scaffold fallen into ruins, and it is high time to give to morality a more solid support. But what support will that be? we must, in order to discover, and form a just idea of it, distinctly consider the different motives of action on which depend the relations that subsist between men: and it will be necessary to estimate, afterwards, the kind and degree of assistance which we may reasonably expect from such a support.

It appears to me, that in renouncing the efficacious aid of religion, we may easily form an idea of the means that they will endeavour to make use of, to attach men to the observance of the rules of morality, and to restrain the dangerous excesses of their passions. They would, undoubtedly, place a proper value on the connexion which subsists between private and general interest: they would avail themselves of the authority of laws, and the fear of punishment: and they would confide still more in the ascendancy of public opinion, and the ambition that

every one ought to have, of gaining the esteem and confidence of his fellow-creatures.

Let us examine separately these different motives : and first, attentively considering the union of private with public interest, let us see if this union be real, and if we can deduce from such a principle any moral instruction truly efficacious.

Society is very far from being a perfect work. We ought not to consider as an harmonious composition, the different relations of which we are witnesses, and particularly the habitual contrast of power and weakness, of slavery and authority, riches and poverty, of luxury and misery. So much inequality, such a motly piece could not form an edifice respectable for the justness of its proportions.

Civil and political order is not, then, excellent by its nature, and we cannot perceive its agreement, till we have deeply studied, and formed to ourselves those reflexions which legislators had to make, and the difficulties that they had to surmount. It is then only, with the assistance of the most attentive meditation, that we discover how those particular relations, which are established by social laws, form, nevertheless, that system of equilibrium, which is most proper to bind together an immense diversity of interests : but a great obstacle to the influence of political morality is, the necessity of giving, for the basis of the love of order, an abstract and complicated idea. What effect on vulgar minds would the scientific harmony of the whole have, opposed daily to the sentiment of injustice and inequality, which arises from the aspect of every part of the social constitution, when we acquire the knowledge of it, in a manner solitary and circumscribed : and how limited is the number of those, who can continually draw together all the scattered links of this vast chain !

It could not be avoided, in the best regulated societies, that some should enjoy, without labour or difficulty, all the conveniencies of life ; and that others, and far the greater number, should be obliged to earn, by the sweat of their brow, a subsistence the most scanty, and a recompense the most confined. It is not to be prevented, that some will find, when oppressed by sickness, all the assistance which officious tenderness and skill can afford ; while others are reduced to partake, in public hospitals, the bare relief that humanity has provided for the indigent. We cannot prevent some from being in a situation to lavish on their families all the advantages of a complete education ; whilst others, impatient to free themselves from a charge so heavy, are constrained to watch eagerly for the first appearance of natural strength, to make their children apply to some profitable labour. In short, we cannot avoid perpetually contrasting the splendor of magnificence with the tatters which misery displays. Such are the effects, inseparable from the laws, respecting property. These are truths, the principles of which I have had occasion to discuss in the work which I composed on administration and political economy : but I ought to repeat them here, since they are found closely connected with other general views. The eminent power of property is one of the social institutions, the influence of which has the greatest extent. This consideration was applicable to the commerce of grain. It ought to be present to the mind, in disquisitions on the duties of administration : and it is still more important, when the question is to be examined, what kind of moral instruction may be proper for mankind ?

In effect, if it appertain to the essence of the laws of right, constantly to introduce and maintain an im-

menſe diſparity in the diſtribution of property—were it an eſſential part of theſe laws, to reduce the moſt numerous claſs of citizens, to that which is ſimply the moſt neceſſary—the inevitable reſult of ſuch a conſtitution would be, to nourish among men, a ſentiment of habitual envy and jealousy. Vainly would you demonſtrate, that theſe laws are the only ones capable of exciting labour, animating induſtry, preventing diſorder, and oppoſing obſtacles to arbitrary acts of authority. All theſe conſiderations, ſufficient, we grant, to fix the opinion and the will of the legiſlator, would not ſtrike in the ſame manner the man thrown on the earth, without property, without reſources, and without hopes: and he will never render free homage to the beauty of the whole, when there is nothing for him but deformity, abjectneſs, and contempt.

Men, in moſt of their political reasonings, are deceived by reſemblances and analogies. The intereſt of ſociety is certainly compoſed of the intereſts of all its members: but it does not follow from this explication, that there is an immediate and conſtant correſpondence between the general and private intereſt. Such an approximation could only be applicable to an imaginary ſocial ſtate, and which we might repreſent as divided into many parts, of which the rich would be the head, and the poor the feet and hands. But political ſociety is not one and the ſame body, except under certain relations, while, relatively to other intereſts, it partakes in as many ramifications of them as there are individuals.

Thoſe conſiderations, to which we annex an idea of general intereſt, would be very often ſuſceptible of numberleſs obſervations: but the principles, we are accuſtomed to receive and tranſmit, in their moſt common acceptation; and we diſcover not the mixt

ideas which compose them, but at the moment when we analyse the principles, in order to draw consequences from them ; in like manner as we perceive not the variety of colours in a ray of light, till the moment we divide them by means of a prism.

The formation of social laws, with reason, ought to appear one of our most admirable conceptions : but this system is not so united in all its parts, that a striking disorder would always be the necessary effect of some irregular movement : thus the man, who violates the laws, does not quickly discover the relation of his actions with the interest of society ; but at the instant enjoys, or thinks to enjoy the fruit of his usurpations.

Should a theatre be on fire, it is certainly the interest of the assembly, that every one go out with order. But if the people, most distant from the entrance, believed they should be able to escape sooner from the danger, by forcing their way through the crowd which surrounds them, they would assuredly determine on this violence, unless a coercive power prevented them : yet the common utility of restricting ourselves to order in such circumstances, would appear an idea more simple, and more distinct, than is the universal importance of maintaining civil order in society.

The only natural defence of this order, is government. Its function obliges it ever to consider the whole ; but the need, which it has of power to carry its decrees into execution, proves evidently, that it is the adversary of many, even when acting in the name of all.

We are then under a great illusion, if we hope to be able to found morality on the connexion of private interest with that of the public—and if we imagine, that the empire of social laws can be separated

from the support of religion. The authority of these laws has nothing decisive for those who have not assisted to establish them : and were we to give to the hereditary distinctions of property an origin the most remote, it is no less true, on this account, that the poor succeeding inhabitants of the earth, struck with the unequal division of its rich domains, and not perceiving the limits and lines of separation traced by nature, would have some right to say : " These compacts, these partitions, this diversity of lots, which procure to some abundance and repose—to others, poverty and labour ; all this legislation, in short, is only advantageous to a small number of privileged men : and we will not subscribe to it, unless compelled by the fear of personal danger. What are then," they would add, " these ideas of right and wrong, with which we are entertained ? What are these dissertations on the necessity of adopting some order in society, and of observing rules ? Our mind bends not to those principles, which, general in theory, become particular in practice. We find some satisfaction and compensation, when the idea of virtue, of submission, and of sacrifice, is united to religious sentiments ; when we believe we shall render an account of our actions to a Supreme Being, whose laws and will we adore, and from whom we have received every thing, and whose approbation presents itself to our eyes, as a motive of emulation, and an object of recompense : but if the contracted bounds of life limit the narrow circle in which all our interest ought to confine itself, where all our speculations and our hopes terminate, what respect owe we then to those whom nature has formed our equals ? To those men, sprung from lifeless clay, to return to it again with us, and to be lost for ever in the same dust ? They have only invented these laws of justice,

to be more tranquil usurpers. Let them descend from their exalted rank, that they may be put on our level, or at least, present us with a partition less unequal, and we shall then be able to conceive, that the observance of the laws of right is of importance to us. Till then we shall have just motives for being the enemies of civil order, which we find so disadvantageous: and we do not comprehend how, in the midst of so many gratifications, which excite our envy, it is, in the name of our own interest, that we ought to renounce them."

Such is the secret language which men, overwhelmed with the distress of their situation, would not fail to use, or those, who, merely in a state of habitual inferiority, found themselves continually hurt by the splendid sight of luxury and magnificence.

It would not be an easy task to combat these sentiments, by endeavouring to paint forcibly the vanity of pleasure in general, and the illusion of most of those objects which captivate our ambition, and the apathy which follows in their train. These reflexions, without doubt, have their weight and efficacy; but if we attentively consider the subject, every thing, that deserves the name of consolation in this world, cannot be addressed with any advantage, but to minds prepared for mild sentiments, by an idea of religion and piety, more or less distinct. We cannot, in the same manner, relieve the barren and ferocious despondency of an unhappy and envious man, who has thrown far behind him all hope. Centred in the bare interests of a life, which is for him eternity, and the universe itself; it is the passion of the moment which enslaves him, and nothing can disengage him from it. He has not the means to catch any vague idea, nor of being content: and as even reason has need, every instant, of the aid of the imagination, he

cannot be encouraged, either by the discourse of his friends, or his own reflexions.

Besides, if we can maintain, in general, that the allotments of happiness and misery are more equal than we imagine—if we can reasonably advance, that labour is preferable to idleness—if we can say, with truth, that embarrassments and inquietudes often accompany wealth, and that contentment of mind appears to be the portion of the middle state of life;—we ought to acknowledge, at the same time, that these axioms are only perfectly just in the eyes of the moralist, who considers man in a comprehensive point of view, and who makes his calculation upon a whole life. But, in the recurrence of our daily desires and hopes, it is impossible to excite to labour by the expectation of fortune, and detract, at the same time, this fortune in decrying the pleasures and conveniencies that it procures. These subtle ideas, without excepting those which may be defended, can never be applicable to real circumstances: and if we sometimes use with success such kind of reflexions to alleviate unavailing sorrow and regret, it is when we have only shadows to cope with.

In short, when we have reduced to precept, all the well known reflexions, on the apparent, but delusive advantages of rank and fortune, we cannot prevent uncultivated minds from being continually struck with the extreme inequality of the different contracts which the rich make with the poor. It might be said, in those moments, that one portion of mankind was formed only for the convenience of another. The poor man sacrifices his time and his strength to multiply round the rich, gratifications of every kind: and he, when he gives in exchange the most scanty subsistence, does not deprive himself of any thing; since the extent of his physical wants

is bounded by the laws of nature. Equality, then, is only re-established by the apathy which the enjoyment even of pleasure produces. But these disgusts compose the back ground in the picture of life; the people perceive them not; and as they have only been acquainted with want, they cannot form any idea of the languor attendant on satiety.

Will any one imprudently say, that if the distinctions of property be an obstacle to the establishment of a political system of morality, we ought, therefore, to labour to destroy them? But if in past ages, when the different degrees of talents and knowledge were not so unequal, men were not able to preserve a community of possessions—can you imagine, that these primitive relations could be re-established, at a time when the superiority of rank and power is enforced by the immoveable strength of disciplined armies?

Besides, when even in the composition of an ideal world, we should have introduced the most exact division of the various possessions esteemed by men, it would still be necessary, in order to preserve a system of real equality, that every one should execute faithfully the duties imposed on him by universal morality; since this is incumbent on every individual, for the sacrifice that all the members of society have made; which society ought to recompense every citizen in particular, for the restriction to which he submits himself.

It is essential to observe still further, that it is not only personal interest, when clearly understood, which ought to be annexed to the idea of public order; it is the same interest when led astray by the passions: then a mere guide is no longer sufficient; a yoke must be imposed, a check always acting, which must be used absolutely. Nothing can be more chi-

merical than to pretend to restrain a man, hurried on by an impetuous imagination, by endeavouring to recal to his remembrance some principles and instructions, which, in the terms of an academic thesis*, ought to be the *result of analysis, of methodizing, of the art of dividing, of developing, and circumscribing ideas.*

It would be, at present, a hardy enterprise, to attempt to conduct men by reason alone; since the first thing that reason discovers is its own weakness. But when we want to rest on maxims which admit of controversy—when we wish to oppose to the strong motive of personal interest, a moral consideration which cannot act but with the concurrence of profound reflexion—we recollect the doctrine of the first economists, who, in establishing the extravagant principles respecting an exclusive right of exporting or monopolizing grain, put off the care of preventing popular commotions till they should happen.

It appears to me, that false reasoning, on the union of private with public interest, arises from applying to the present state of society, the principles which have served as the base for their formation; this very natural confusion is one grand source of error. Let us try to render clear a proposition, which, at first, appears difficult to comprehend: and in this light we will suppose, for a moment, the future generation assembled in idea, in an imaginary world, and ignorant, before they inhabit the earth, who those individuals are, that shall be born of parents loaded with the gifts of fortune, and of those who are beset with misery from their cradle. They are instructed in the principles of civil rights: and

* Thesis proposed by the French academy, with a prize for the best catechism of morals, the instructions of which were to be founded on the principles of natural right only.

the convenience of the laws of order, has been represented to them, and a sketch is drawn of the disorder, which would be the inevitable consequence of a continual variation in the division of property : then all those who are to compose the new generation, equally uncertain of the lot that the chance of birth reserves for them, subscribe unanimously to those events which await them ; and at the very moment, in which the relations of society exist only in speculation, it might be truly said, that the personal interest is lost in the public. But this identity ceases, when each, arrived on the earth, has taken possession of his lot. It is then no longer possible, that the various personal interests should concur to the maintenance of these prodigious gradations of rank and fortune, which were derived from the chance of birth : and those, to whom cares and wants have fallen, will not be resigned to the inferiority of their condition, but by a grand religious principle alone, which can make them perceive an eternal justice, and place them in imagination before time, and before the laws.

There is nothing so easy, as the establishment of conventions, and making rules to be observed, till the moment of the drawing of a lottery. Every one then, at the same point of view, finds all good, all just, and well contrived ; and peace reigns by common agreement. But as soon as the blanks and prizes are known, the mind changes, the temper grows sour : and without the check of authority, it would become unmanageable, envious, quarrellsome, and sometimes unjust and violent.

We see, however, the consequence to be drawn from the preceding reflexions ; that political societies in contemplation, and in reality, present to our observation two different periods : and as these pe-

riods are not separated by any apparent limits, they are almost always confounded in the mind of the political moralist. He, who believes in the union of private interest with that of the public, and who celebrates this harmony, has only considered society in its general and primitive plan. He, who thinks, on the contrary, that the whole is wrong and discordant, because there is a great difference of power and fortune, has considered it only under its actual vicissitudes. Both these mistakes have received a sanction from celebrated writers. The man, hurried away by a lively imagination, and strongly impressed by present objects, has been struck by the inequality of conditions : and the philosopher, transported by his abstractions beyond the circle of human society, has only perceived those relations and principles which led men to form the first institution of civil laws. Thus, every where we see, that most disputes relate to mere difference of positions, and the various points of view in which the same subject is considered. There are so many stations in the moral world, that, according to that which we choose, the picture changes entirely.

Hitherto we have endeavoured to understand the effect which we might expect from a system of morality, by applying this kind of instruction only to private interest, when most clearly ascertained. It remains now to show, that every species of education, which demands time and reflexion, cannot belong, in any manner, to the class of men most numerous : and to be sensible of this truth, it is sufficient to turn our attention on the social state of those who are destitute of property, and of talents which might supply its place. Obligated to have recourse to hard labour, where nothing is required but to employ their bodily strength, their concurrence, and the

power of riches, reduce the wages of this numerous class to what is absolutely necessary. They cannot, without difficulty, support their children: and they may well be impatient of qualifying them for useful occupations to relieve themselves; and this prevents their being sent to public schools, except during their infancy. Thus, ignorance and poverty are in the midst of our societies, and the hereditary lot of the greater part of the citizens. There is only to be found an alleviation of this general law, in those countries where the constitution of the government encourages the high price of labour, and gives the poor some means of resisting the despotism of fortune. However, if such be the inevitable effect of our civil and political legislation, how shall we be able to bind men, without distinction, to the maintenance of public order, by any instruction, I do not say complicated, but to which the exercise of long reasoning forms only a necessary introduction? It would not be sufficient to endow institutions—it would be still more necessary to pay the scholars for their time; since, for the lower class, time is, even very early in life, their only means of subsistence.

Nevertheless, morality is not, like other human sciences, a knowledge, that we may be at liberty to acquire at our leisure. The quickest instruction is still too slow; since man has a natural power of doing evil, before his mind is in a state to apply to reflection, and connect the most simple ideas.

It is not then a political catechism which would be proper for the instruction of the people. It is not a course of precepts founded on the union of public and private interest, which can suit with the measure of their understanding. Even should a doctrine of that kind appear as just as it seems to me liable to be disputed, they will never be able to render the prin-

ciples of it distinct enough, to apply them to the purposes of instructing those whose education continues for so short a time. Morality, founded on religion, by its active influence, is precisely adapted to the particular situation of the greater number of men : and this agreement is so perfect, that it seems one of the remarkable features of universal harmony. Religion alone has power to persuade with celerity ; because it excites passion, while it informs the understanding ; because it alone has the means of rendering obvious what it recommends ; because it speaks in the name of God, and it is easy to inspire respect for him, whose power is every where evident to the eyes of the simple and skilful, to the eyes of children, and men advanced to maturity.

In order to attack this truth, let it not be said, that the idea of a God is of all others the most incomprehensible ; and if it be possible to derive useful instruction from so metaphysical a principle, we ought to expect more good from precepts which depend on the common relations of life. Such an objection is a mere subtilty. The distinct knowledge of the essence of a God, the Creator of the world, is, undoubtedly, above the comprehension of men of every age, and all faculties ; but it is not the same with the vague idea of a heavenly power, who punishes and who rewards. Parental authority, and the helplessness of infancy, prepare us early for ideas of obedience and command : and the world is such a stupendous wonder, a theatre of such continual prodigies, that it is easy to annex, at an early period, hope and fear to the idea of a Supreme Being. Thus, the infinity of a God, Creator and Director of the universe, is so far from having power to divert our respect and adoration, that even the clouds, with which he envelopes himself, lend a new force to re-

ligious sentiments. A man often remains uninterested amidst the discoveries of his reason : but it is always easy to move him, whenever we address ourselves to his imagination ; for this faculty of our mind excites us continually to action, by presenting to our eyes a great space, and by keeping us always at a certain distance from the object we have in view. Man is so disposed to wonder at a power, of which he is ignorant of the springs—this sentiment is so natural to him, that what we ought to guard against the most in his education, is the inconsiderate insinuation of various terrors, of which he is susceptible. Thus, not only the true idea of the existence of an All-powerful God, but mere credulous faith in superstitious opinions, will always have more power over the common class of men, than abstract precepts, or general considerations. I know not, if it might not even be said, with truth, that the future of this short life, when we contemplate it, is further from us than the distant prospective offered to the mind by religion ; because our imagination is less restrained, and the minutest description of reason can never equal in power, the lively and impulsive ardour of these affections of our souls.

I resume the series of my reflexions, and set down here an important observation : which is, that the more the increase of taxes keeps the people in despondency and misery, the more indispensable is it to give them a religious education ; for it is in the irritation of wretchedness, that we all have need of powerful restraint and of daily consolations. The successive abuse of strength and authority, in overturning all the relations which originally existed between men, have raised, in the midst of them, an edifice so artificial, and in which there reigns so much disproportion, that the idea of a God is become more

necessary than ever, to serve as a leveller of this confused assemblage of disparities. And if we can ever imagine, that a people should exist, subject only to the laws of a political morality, we should represent, without doubt, a rising nation, which would be restrained by the vigour of patriotism in its prime; a nation which would occupy a country where riches had not had time to accumulate—where the distance of the habitations from each other contributed to the maintenance of domestic manners—where agriculture, that simple and peaceful occupation, would be the favourite employment—where the work of the hands would obtain a recompense proportioned to the scarcity of the workmen, and the extensive usefulness of the labour: we should represent, in short, a nation where the laws and the form of the government would favour, during a long time, equality of rank and property. But in our ancient kingdoms in Europe, where the growth of riches continually augments the difference of fortunes and the distance of conditions—in our old political bodies, where we are crowded together, and where misery and magnificence are ever mingled—it must be a morality, fortified by religion, that shall restrain these numerous spectators of so many possessions and objects of envy, and who, placed so near every thing which they call happiness, can yet never aspire to it.

It may be asked, perhaps, in consequence of these reflexions, whether religion, which strengthens every tie, and fortifies every obligation, is not favourable to tyranny? Such a conclusion would be unreasonable. But religion, which affords comfort under every affliction, would necessarily soothe also the ills which arise from despotism; however, it is neither the origin, nor the support of it. Religion, well understood, would not lend its support but to

order and justice; and the instruction of political morality proposes to itself the same end. Thus, in both plans of education, the rights of the sovereign, as well as those of the citizens, constitute simply one of the elementary parts of the general system of our duties.

I shall only observe, that the insufficiency of political morality would appear still more obvious, in a country, where the nation, subject to the authority of an absolute prince, would have no share in the government; for personal interest no longer having an habitual communication with the general interest, there would be just ground to fear, that in wishing to hold out the union of these two interests as the essential motive of virtue, the greater number would retain only this idea, that personality was admitted for the first principle: and consequently every one ought to reserve to himself the right of judging of the times and circumstances when self-love and patriotism are to be separated, or united. And how many errors would not this produce? Public good, like all abstract ideas, has not a precise definition. It is, for the greater part of mankind, a sea without bounds; and it requires not much address or shrewdness to confound all our analogies. We may know how we would form, according to our taste, the alliance of all the moral ideas, in considering with what facility men know how to reconcile with some one virtuous quality the habitual infirmities of their character. He, who wounds without discretion, prides himself in his frankness and courage. He, who is cowardly and timid in his sentiments and in his words, boasts of his caution and circumspection; and by a new refinement, of which I have seen singular examples, he, who asks of the sovereign pecuniary favours, endeavours to persuade him, that he

is impelled to this solicitation, only by a noble love of honourable distinction. Every one is ingenious in fixing the point of union which connects his passions with some virtue: would they, then, be less expert at finding some conformity between their own interest and that of the public?

I cannot, I avow, without disgust, and even horror, conceive the absurd notion of a political society, destitute of that governing motive afforded by religion, and restrained only by a pretended connexion of their private interest with the general. What circumscribed judges! What a multiplicity of opinions, sentiments and wills! All would be in confusion, if we left to men the liberty of drawing their own conclusions. They must absolutely have a simple idea to regulate their conduct, especially when the application of this principle may be infinitely diversified. God in delivering his laws on mount Sinai, had need but to say, *Thou shalt not steal*; and with the awful idea of that God, whom every thing recalls to our minds, whom every thing impresses on the human heart, this short commandment preserves, at all times, a sufficient authority. But when political philosophy says, *Thou shalt not steal*, it would be necessary to add to this precept, a train of reasoning, on the laws of right, on the inequality of conditions, and on the various social relations; in order to persuade us that it comprehends every motive, that it answers all objections, and resists all attacks. It is necessary, further, that by the lessons of this philosophy, the most uncultivated minds should be qualified to follow the different ramifications which unite, disunite, and reunite afresh the personal to the public interest: what an enterprise! It is, perhaps, like wishing to employ a course of anatomy, in order to direct a child in the choice of such aliments as are proper

for it, instead of beginning to conduct it by the counsels and the authority of its mother.

These same remarks are applicable to all the virtues, of which the observance is essential to public order. What method would plain reasoning take to persuade a single man, that he ought not to deprive a husband of the affections of his wife? Where would you assign him a distinct recompense for the sacrifice of his passion? What windings should we not be obliged to run over, to demonstrate to an ambitious man, that he ought not, in secret, to calumniate his rival; to the solitary miser, armed with indifference, that he ought not to remove himself from every occasion of doing good; to a disposition ardent and revengeful, that he ought not to obey those urgent impulses which hurry him away; to a man in want, that he ought not to have recourse to falsehood to procure attention, or to deceive in any other manner? And how many other positions would offer the same difficulties, and still greater? Abstract ideas, the best arranged, can never conquer us but by long arguments; since the peculiar nature of these ideas is to disengage our reasoning from the feelings, and consequently from striking and sudden impressions: besides, political morality, like every thing which the mind only produces, would be always for us merely an opinion,—an opinion from which we should have a right to appeal, at any time, to the tribunal of our reason. The lessons of men are nothing but representations of their judgment; and the sentiments of some draw not the will of others. There is not any principle of morality, which, under forms absolutely human, would not be susceptible of exceptions, or of some modification: and there is nothing so compounded as the idea of the connexion of virtue with happiness. In short, while our understanding has a

difficulty in comprehending and clearly distinguishing that union, the objects of our passions are every where apparent, and all our senses are pre-engaged by them. The miser beholds gold and silver; the ambitious man, those honours which are conferred on others; the debauchee, the objects of his luxury. Virtue has nothing left but reasoning; and is then in want of being sustained by religious sentiments, and by the enlivening hopes which accompany them.

Thus, in a government where you would wish to substitute political morality for a religious education, it would become, perhaps, indispensable, to guard men from receiving any ideas calculated to exalt their minds: it would be necessary to divert them from the different competitions which excite self-love and ambition: they must withdraw themselves from the habitual society of women: and it would be still more incumbent on them to abolish the use of money, that attracting and confused image of all kinds of gratifications. In short, in taking from men their religious hopes, and depriving them thus of the encouragements to virtue, which the imagination gives birth to, every exertion must be tried to prevent this unruly imagination from seconding vice, and all the passions, contrary to public order. It was because Telemachus was accompanied by a Divinity, that he could, without danger, visit the sumptuous court of Sesostris, and the enchanting abodes of Eucharis and Calypso.

It is, indeed, an age the most pleasant, as well as the safest of our life, which we cannot pass without a guide. We must, then, in order to pass with security through the tempestuous days of youth, have principles which command us, and not reflexions to counsel us; these have not any power but in proportion to the vigour of the mind; and the mind is only

formed by experience and a long conflict of opinions.

Religious instructions have the peculiar advantage of seizing the imagination, and of interesting our sensibility, those two brilliant faculties of our early years. Thus, then, even supposing that we could establish a course of political morality, sufficiently propped by reasoning, for defending from vice men enlightened by maturity, I should still say, that a similar philosophy would not be suitable to youth, and that this armour is too heavy for them.

In short, the lessons of human wisdom, which cannot govern us during the ardour of our passions, are equally insufficient, when our strength being broken by disease, we are no longer in a state to comprehend a variety of relations ; instead of which, such are the pleasing emotions, that accompany the language of religion, that in the successive decline of our faculties, this language still keeps pace with them.

Nevertheless, if we were ever to be persuaded, that there was on earth a more certain encouragement to virtue than religion, its powers would be immediately weakened. It would not be half so interesting, nor could it reign when divided. If its sentiments did not overflow, as we may say, the human heart, all its influence would vanish.

Religious instruction, in assembling all the means proper to excite men to virtue, neglects not, it is true, to point out the relations, which exist between the observance of the laws of morality and the happiness of life ; but it is as an accessory motive, that these considerations are presented : and it is not necessary to support them by the same proofs as a fundamental principle requires. Also, when people are taught early, that vices and crimes lead to misery

on earth, these doctrines make not a lasting impression on them, but in proportion as we succeed, at the same time, in convincing them of the constant influence of a providence over all the events of this world.

One important reason still exempts religious professors, from attaching themselves to demonstrate, that the principal advantages which excite the envy of men, are an absolute consequence of the observance of the laws of order : it is, that sacrifices, supported by an idea of duty, are changed into real satisfactions ; and the sentiments, which the virtuous enjoy from piety, compose an essential part of their happiness. But what consolation can a man have by way of return—what secret approbation can we grant him, when we know not any other authority than that of political morality—and when virtue is nothing but an opposition between private and public interest ?

Religion certainly proposes to man his own happiness, as an object and ultimate end. But as this happiness is placed at a distance, religion conducts us to it by wholesome restrictions and temporary sacrifices. It regards only the sublimest part of us, that which disunites us from the present moment, in order to connect us with futurity. It offers us hopes, which withdraw us from worldly interest, so far as is necessary to prevent us from being immoderately devoted to the disorderly impression of our senses, and the tyranny of our passions. Irreligion, on the contrary, whose lessons teach us, that we are only masters of the present moment, concentrates us more and more within ourselves, and there is nothing beautiful or good in this condition ; for grandeur, of every kind, relates to the extent of those relations which we comprehend : and, in a like acceptation, our sentiments submit to the same laws.

Those, who represent the obligations of religion as indifferent, assure us, that we may repose safely the maintenance of morality on some general sentiments, which we have adopted : but they do not consider, that these sentiments derive their origin, and almost all their force, from that spirit of religion which they wish to weaken. Yes, even humanity, this emotion of a noble soul, is animated and fortified by the idea of a Supreme Being. The alliance between men holds but feebly from the conformity of their organization : nor can it be attributed to the similitude of their passions, that continual source of so much hatred. It depends essentially on our connexion with the same Author, the same Superintendant, the same Judge. It is founded on the equality of our right to the same hopes, and on that train of duties inculcated by education, and rendered respectable by the habitual dominion of religious opinions. Alas ! it is a melancholy avowal, that men have so many infirmities, so much injustice, selfishness, and ingratitude, at least, in the eyes of those who have observed them collectively, that we never can keep them in harmony by the mere lessons of wisdom. It is not always because they are amiable, that we love them. It is sometimes, and very often, indeed, because we ought to love them, that we find them amiable. Yes, goodness and forbearance, these qualities the most simple, still require to be compared, from time to time, with an idea general and predominant, the band of all our virtues. The passions of others wound us in so many ways, and there is often so much depth and energy in our self-love, that we have need of some succour to be constantly generous in our sentiments, and to be really interested for all our fellow-creatures, in the midst of whom we are placed.

In short, not to dissemble, if a man once came to consider himself as a being that is the child of chance, or of blind necessity, and tending only to the dust from whence he sprung, and to which he must return, he would despise himself: and far from seeking to rise to noble and virtuous reflexions, he would consider this species of ambition as a fantastic idea, which consumes, in a vain and illusory manner, a part of those fleeting minutes which he has to pass on earth: and all his attention being fixed on the shortness of life, and on the eternal silence which must close the scene, he would only think *how to devour his reign of a moment.*

How dangerous, then, would it be, on this supposition, to show to men the extremity of the chain which unites them together! It is in worldly affairs this knowledge of having received the last favour, which renders them ungrateful towards those from whom they no longer expect any thing: and the same sentiment would weaken the power of morality, if our lease was manifestly only for this world. It is then religion which ought to strengthen those ties, and defend the entire system of our duty against the stratagems of reasoning and the artifices of our minds. It is necessary, in order to oblige all men, to consider with respect the laws of morality, to teach them early, that the social virtues are an homage rendered to the perfections and to the beneficent intentions of the Sovereign Author of nature, of that infinite Being, who is pleased with the preservation of order, and the private sacrifices which the accomplishment of this grand design requires. And when I see modern philosophers tracing, with an able hand, the general plan of our duties—when I see them fixing with judgment the reciprocal obligations of citizens—and giving, at last, for the basis to this

legislation, personal interest and the love of praise— I recollect the system of those Indian philosophers, who, after having studied the revolutions of the heavenly bodies, being perplexed to determine the power which sustained the vaulted firmament, thought they had freed it from difficulty, by placing the universe on the back of an elephant, and this elephant on a tortoise. We shall imitate these philosophers, and, like them, shall never proceed but by degradation, whenever, by endeavouring to form a chain of duties and moral principles, we do not place the last link above worldly considerations, and beyond the limits of our social conventions.

SECOND CHAPTER.

The same subject continued. A parallel between the influence of religious principles, and of laws and opinions.

AFTER having examined, as I have just done, in the preceding chapter, if it were possible to found morality on the connexion of private with public interest, it remains for me to consider, if the punishments inflicted by the sovereign, if the sceptre, which public opinion sways, have sufficient power to restrain men, and bind them to the observance of their duty.

It is necessary to proceed by common ideas, in order to advance one degree in the research of truth: thus I ought, at first, in this place, to recollect, that the penal laws cannot be applied but to offences known and proved. This consideration contracts their power within a very narrow circle. However, crimes se-

cretly committed, are not the only ones which are beyond the cognizance of laws : we must place in this rank every reprehensible action, which, for want of a distinct character, can never be pointed out ; the number of them is prodigious : the rigour of parents, ingratitude of children, the inhumanity of abandoning their nurses, treachery in friendship, the violation of domestic comfort, disunion sown in the bosoms of families, levity of principles in every social connexion, perfidious counsels, artful and slanderous insinuations, rigorous exercise of authority, favour and partiality of judges, their inattention, their idleness and severity, endeavours to obtain places of importance, with a consciousness of incapacity, corrupt flatteries addressed to sovereigns or ministers, statesmen indifferent to public good, their vile and pernicious jealousies, and their political dissensions, excited in order to render themselves necessary, wars instigated by ambition, intolerance under the cover of zeal ; in short, many other fatal evils, which the laws cannot either follow or describe, and which often do much mischief, before they give any opportunity for public censure. We ought not even to desire that this censure pass certain bounds ; because authority, applied to obscure faults, or those susceptible of various interpretations, easily degenerates into tyranny : and as there is nothing so transitory as thought—nothing so secret as our sentiment—none but an invisible power, whose authority seems to participate of the divine, has a right to enter into the secrets of our hearts.

It is then only, at the tribunal of his own conscience, that a man can be interrogated about a number of actions and intentions, which escape the inspection of government. Let us beware of overturning the authority of a judge so active and enlighten-

ed. Let us beware of weakening it voluntarily; and let us not be so imprudent as to repose only on social discipline. I will even venture to say, that the power of conscience is perhaps still more necessary in the age we live in, than in any of the preceding. Tho' society no longer presents us with a view of those vices and crimes which shock us by their deformity; yet licentiousness of morals, and refinement of manners, have almost imperceptibly blended good and evil—vice and decency—falsehood and truth—selfishness and magnanimity. It is more important than ever, to oppose to this secret depravity, an interior authority, which pries into the mysterious windings of disguise, and whose action may be as penetrating, as our dissimulation seems artful and well contrived.

It is undoubtedly, because a similar authority appears absolutely necessary to the maintenance of public order, that several philosophic writers have endeavoured to introduce it as a principle of atheism. In such a system the whole is fictitious. They speak of our blushing at the recollection of our follies, of dreading our own secret reproaches, and of being afraid of the condemnation, which, in the calm of reflection, we shall pronounce against ourselves. But these sentiments, which have so much force with the idea of a God, they know not what to unite them with, when they would give only for a guide the most active personal interest, and when all the grand communications, established between men by religious opinions, are absolutely broken; conscience is then an expression void of meaning, a useless word in the language. We may still feel remorse, that is to say, regret at being deceived in the pursuits of ambition, in promoting our interest, in the choice of means which we employ to obtain the respect and praise of others; in short, in the various calculations of our

worldly advantage. But such remorse is only an exaltation of our self-love. We deify, in some measure, our judgment and understanding ; and we make at last all our actions appear before these false idols, to reproach us with our errors and weaknesses. We thus voluntarily become our own tormentors. But when this persecution is too importunate, we have it in our power to command our tyrants to use more indulgence towards us. It is not the same with the reproaches of conscience. The sentiments which produce them have nothing compounded or artificial in them. We cannot corrupt our judge, nor enter into a compromise with him. That which seduces men never deceives him : and, amidst the giddiness of prosperity, in the intoxication of the greatest success, his looks are inevitably fixed on us : and we cannot but with terror enjoy the applause and the triumphs which we have not merited.

We read in several modern books, that with good laws we should always have morality sufficient : but I cannot adopt this opinion. Man is a being so compounded, and his relations with his species are so various and so fine, that to regulate his mind and direct his conduct, he has need of a multitude of sentiments, on which the commands of the sovereign have not any hold. They are all simple and declared duties, which the legislators have reduced to precepts : and this rough building, termed civil laws, leaves vacancies throughout. The laws require merely a blind obedience : and as they enjoin and prohibit only actions, are absolutely indifferent to the private sentiments of men. The moral edifice, which they raise, is in several parts a mere exterior form, and it is at the roof, if I may say so, that they have begun. Religion proceeds in a manner diametrically opposite. It is in the heart, it is in the recesses of

conscience, that it lays its first base. It appears to be acquainted with the grand secrets of nature. It sows in the earth a grain; and this grain is nourished, and transformed into numerous branches, which, without any effort, spring up, and extend themselves to all dimensions and in every kind of form.

I will suppose, nevertheless, that we believed it sufficient for the maintenance of public order, to reduce morality to the spirit of civil laws—it would still be out of the power of men to draw from this assimilation familiar instructions proper to form a code of education; for these laws, simple in their commands, are not so in their principles. We perceive not immediately why revenge, the most just, is prohibited—why we have not the power to do ourselves justice by the same means a ravisher would use—why we have not a right to resist with violence the tyrannic oppressor—in short, why certain actions, some indifferent in themselves, and some hurtful to others, are condemned in a general and uniform manner: a kind of combination is necessary to discover, that the legislator himself is wandering from natural ideas, in order to prevent every person from being a judge in his own cause: and to avoid that, those exceptions and distinctions, of which every circumstance is susceptible, might never be determined by the judgment of individuals. In the same manner, from those indirect motives, the laws treat with more rigour an offence difficult to define, than a disorder more reprehensible in itself; but of which the excesses might be easily perceived: and they observe still the same rule with respect to crimes which are surrounded by greater allurements, though this seduction is even a motive for indulgence in the eyes of simple justice; in short, the laws, in adopting a more determined method, to constrain debtors to the discharge of their obligations,

prove that they are not compassionate to unforeseen misfortunes, nor actuated by other motives of equity which merit an equal interest; all their attention is fixed on the relation of engagements with the political resources, which arise from commerce and its transactions. There exists thus a multitude of prohibitions of punishments, or gradations in the penalties, which have not any connexion but with the general views of the legislation, and agree not with the circumscribed good sense, which determines the judgment of individuals. It is then often, by considerations very extensive and complicated, that an action is criminal or reprehensible in the eyes of the law: thus, we know not how to erect, on this base alone, a system of morality, of which every one can have a clear perception; and since the legislator carefully avoids submitting any thing to private examination, because he sacrifices often to this principle natural justice, how then can he wish, at the same time, to give us for rule of conduct a political morality, which is all founded on reasoning?

It is of consequence still to observe, that to the eyes of the greater number of men, the sense of the laws, and the decrees formed by those who interpret them, ought necessarily to be identified and blended, and form only one point of view; and as the judges are frequently exposed to error, the true spirit of legislation remains often in obscurity, and we with difficulty discern it.

It is, perhaps, because laws are the work of our understanding, that we are disposed to grant them a universal dominion: but I will avow, I am far from thinking that they can ever be substituted instead of the salutary influence of religion, and that I believe them insufficient even to regulate the things immediately under their jurisdiction; thus I will request you to

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reflect, if the unfortunate errors with which we reproach criminal tribunals, have not their source in the faults committed by sovereign authority ; when it has referred all the duties of the judges to the injunctions of the law, and when it has refused to confide any longer in the conscience and private sentiments of the magistrates.

Let us render this observation more clear by a single example chosen from a number. We demand at present, that the legislator explain himself afresh on the grand question, what witnesses are necessary ; but will he not always run the risk of being deceived, whether he absolutely rejects a probable evidence, or whether he makes the fate of a criminal depend upon it ? How will he determine, that the testimony of an honest man, identifying the person of an assassin, in his own cause, should not be reckoned any thing by the judge ? and how can he pretend, also, that a testimony of this nature is sufficient to determine a condemnation, when he, who gives the evidence, appears suspicious, either from the motives, which we must suppose actuate him, or from the improbability of his assertion ? Reason is then placed between two extremes : but the intermediate ideas not being consonant with the absolute language of law, we ought, in such circumstances, to leave much to the wisdom and integrity of the magistrates ; and so far from serving innocence by acting otherwise, we visibly endanger it ; because judges habituate themselves to render the laws responsible for every thing, and respectfully submit to the letter, instead of obeying the spirit, which is the earnest desire of obtaining truth. What, then, some will say, would you wish, that there should be no positive instructions, neither to serve for a guide in the examination of crimes, nor to determine the character by which

these crimes may be distinguished? This was never in my mind: but I could wish, that in an affair of such serious importance, they would unite to the judgment which proceeded from the prudence of the legislature, that which may be brought by the wisdom of the judges. I could wish, that the criminal legislation prescribed to the magistrates, not all that they are obliged to do, but all from which they are not exempt; not all that is sufficient to determine their opinion, but all which ought to be the indispensable condition of a capital punishment. Guided by such a spirit, the commands given by the law, would be a safeguard against the ignorance, or possible prevarication of the judges. But as any general rule, any immutable principle, is not applicable to an infinite diversity of circumstances, I would give to innocence a new defender, interesting in a more immediate manner the morality of the judges to search for and examine truth, and to recal continually all the extent of their obligations. I could wish, that, previous to their passing a sentence of condemnation, raising one of their hands towards heaven, they pronounced with earnestness these words: "I attest, that the man accused before us, appears to me guilty, according to the law, and according to my own private judgment." It is not sufficient, that we command a judge to examine with probity, if the proofs of an offence be conformable to those required by the statute. It is necessary to inform a magistrate, that he ought to enquire into the truth by all the means that scrupulous anxiety can suggest. He should know, that, called to decide on the life and the honour of men, his understanding and his heart ought to be enlisted in the cause of humanity, and that there are not any limits opposed to bound his duty. Then, without failing in any of the enquiries ordained by

the laws, he would force himself to go still further, that no evidence, proper to make an impression on a reasonable man, might be rejected, at the same time, that none might have so decisive a force, that the examination of circumstances would ever appear useless. The judges then would make use of that sagacity, which seems to discern instinctively. They would not then disdain to read even the looks of the accuser and the accused; and they would not believe it a matter of indifference to observe with attention, all those emotions of nature, where sometimes truth is painted with so much energy. Then, in short, innocence would be under the protection of something as pure as itself, the scrupulous conscience of a judge.

We have never, perhaps, sufficiently considered, how much a methodical order, when we confine ourselves too servilely to it, contracts the bounds of the mind. It becomes then like a foot-path traced between two banks, which prevent our discovering what is not in a straight line. The strict observance of method diverts us also from consulting that light, sometimes so lively, of which the soul only is the focus; for in subjecting us to a positive course of things always regular, and in making us find pleasure in a determined path, which offers continual repose to our thoughts, it incapacitates for thinking that delicate perception of natural sentiments, which has nothing fixed or circumscribed, but whose free flight often makes us approach to truth, as by a kind of instinct or inspiration.

I should stray too far from my subject, if I extended these reflexions: and I hasten to connect them with the subject of this chapter, in repeating again, that if the laws be insufficient, even in those decisions submitted to their authority—and if they have

absolute need of the aid of religion, whenever they impose on their private expounders duties a little complicated—they would be still less able to supply the habitual and daily influence of that motive, the most powerful of all, and the only one, at the same time, of which the action will be sufficiently penetrating, to follow us in the mazes of our conduct, and in the labyrinth of our thoughts.

I ought now to direct your attention towards other considerations. All that is required by public order, all that is of importance to society, some will say, is, that criminals may not escape the sword of justice, and that an attentive superintendence discover them under the cloud where they seek to conceal themselves. I will not here recal the various obstacles, which are opposed to the plenitude of this vigilance: every one may perceive them, or form an idea of them. But I hasten to observe, that in considering society in its actual state, we ought not to forget, that religious sentiments have greatly diminished the task of government. A scene quite new would open, if we had for our guide only political morality. It would not then be a few men without principles, who would trouble the public order: more able actors would mix in the throng: some, conducted by mature reflexion, and others, carried away by seducing appearances, would be incessantly at war with all those, whose fortune excited their jealousy: and then only we should know how many opportunities there are of doing evil, and injuring others. It would also happen, that all these enemies of public order not being disconcerted by the reproaches of their conscience, would become every day more expert in the art of avoiding the observation of justice: and the dangers, to which the imprudent exposed themselves, would not discourage the ingenious.

It is then, if I may be permitted so to express

myself, because the laws find men in a healthy state, prepared by religious instruction, that they can restrain them : but if a system of education, merely political, were ever to prevail, new precautions and new chains would become absolutely necessary : and, after having freed us from the mild ties of religion, the projectors of such a system would increase our civil slavery, would bend our necks under the hard-
eit of all yokes, that which is imposed by our fellow-creatures.

Religion, whose influence they wish us to reject, is better appropriated, than they think, to the mixture of pride and weakness, which constitutes our nature : and for us, such as we are, its action is far preferable to that of the penal laws. It is not before his equals, armed with the rod of vengeance, that the culprit is made to appear. It is not to their ignorance, or to their inexorable justice, that he is abandoned. It is at the tribunal of his own conscience, that religion informs against him ; before a God, Sovereign of the world, that it humbles, and, in the name of a tender and merciful Father, that it comforts him. Alas ! while you at once take from us both our consolation and our true dignity, you wish to refer every thing to private interest and public punishment. But permit me to listen to these commands which come from on high. Leave me to divert my attention from the menacing sceptre which the potentates of the earth wield in their hand : leave me to account with him, before whom they shrink into nothing : leave me, in short, to address myself to him who pardons, and who, at the moment I have offended, permits me still to love him, and rely on his grace !—Alas ! without the connexion with a Supreme Being, Author of all nature, we should only listen to the vile counsels of selfish prudence ; we should only have to flatter and adore the

rulers of nations, and all those, who, in an absolute monarchy, are the numerous representatives of the authority of the prince. Yes, talents, sentiments, ought to bend before these distributors of so much good and evil, if nothing exist beyond worldly interest : and when once every one cringes, there is no more dignity in the character : men become incapable of any great action, and unequal to any moral excellence.

Religious opinions have the double merit of maintaining us in the obedience due to the laws and the sovereign, and of nourishing in our hearts a sentiment which sustains our courage ; reminds men of their true grandeur ; teaches submission without meanness ; and prevents, above all, cowardly humiliations before transitory idols, in showing, at a distance, the last period, when all must return to an equality before the Master of the world.

The idea of a God, at the same distance from all men, serves also to console us for that shocking superiority of rank and fortune, under the oppression of which we live. It is necessary to transport ourselves to the heights religion discovers, to consider with a kind of calmness and indifference the frivolous pretensions of some, and the confident haughtiness of others : and such objects of regret, or of envy, which appeared a Colossus to our imagination, are changed into a grain of sand, when we contrast them with the grand prospects, which such sublime meditations display to our view.

Those then are blind, or indifferent to our interest, who wish to substitute, instead of religious instructions, political and worldly maxims : and in like manner, those are inflexible and unfeeling, who believe they shall be able to conduct men only by terror ; and who, in contesting the salutary influence

of religious opinions, expect less from them, than from the axe of the lictors, and the apparatus of execution. What is then this wretched system? For, even supposing that the different means for securing public tranquillity were equal in their effect, should we not prefer religious principles, which prevent crimes, to the strict laws which punish them? I understand not, besides, how, with the same hand that they repel religious sentiments, they wish to raise every where scaffolds, and multiply, without scruple, those frightful theatres of severity; for if men, hurried onwards to crimes, were only governed by blind necessity, alas! what do they deserve? And if we still determine to destroy them as examples, we should assist at their execution, as at that of beings devoted for the good of society, as Iphigenia was sacrificed at Aulis for the salvation of Greece.

Religion is, in another respect, superior to the laws, which are ever armed for vengeance. Instead of that, religion, even when threatening, nourishes also the hopes of pardon and felicity: and I believe, contrary to the generally received opinion, that man, by his nature, is more constantly animated by hope, than restrained by fear. The former of these sentiments composes the tenor of our life; while the latter is the effect of an extraordinary circumstance, or particular situation. In short, courage, or want of consideration, turns our attention from danger; while ideas of happiness are perpetually present, and blended, if I may use the expression, with our whole existence.

I perceive, however, that some may say to me, it is not only of civil and penal laws that we mean to speak, when we maintain that good public institutions would be an efficacious substitute for the influence of religion. It would be necessary to introduce

laws of education, proper to modify, beforehand, the mind, and form the character. But they have not explained, and I am ignorant that there are such laws, which they wish to distinguish from the general doctrines we are acquainted with; doctrines susceptible, undoubtedly, of different degrees of perfection, which, before instructing us not only in the virtues simple and real, but in all those mixed and conventional, have necessarily a vague character, and could not separate themselves from the support that they borrow from the fixed and precise ideas of religion. They may cite the example of Sparta, where the state undertook the education of the citizens, and formed, by laws, the extraordinary manners which history has delineated. But that government, aided in this enterprise by all the influence of paternal authority, nevertheless proposed but two great objects—the encouragement of martial qualities—and the maintenance of liberty. Morality was not made interesting; though among us it requires so much application; and it was rendered less necessary, as every institution tended to introduce a perfect equality of rank and fortune, and opposed all kind of communication with foreigners. In short, it was, after all, a religious opinion which subjected the Spartans to the authority of their legislator: and without their confidence in the oracle of Delphos, Lycurgus had only been a celebrated philosopher.

We are still further, at present, from the disposition and situation which would allow laws of education to govern us, supported only by a political spirit. In order to make the trial, we must be divided into little associations; and by some means not yet discovered, be able to oppose invincible obstacles to the enlargement of them, and to preserve us from the desires and voluptuousness which are the inevitable

consequence of an augmentation of wealth, and the progress of the arts and sciences. In short, and it is a singular remark, at a period when man is become a being the most compounded, on account of those social modifications, he has need, more than ever, of a principle which will penetrate to the very source of his numerous affections: consequently it would be necessary suddenly to carry him back to his primitive simplicity, to make him agree, in some measure, with the limited extent of an education purely civil. Let me add, that a like education could not be adapted to the commonalty, as in Sparta. They must be separated from the citizens, and kept in servitude; an observation which leads me to a very important reflexion: it is, that in a country where slavery would be introduced, where the most numerous class would be governed by the continual fear of the severest chastisement, they would be able to confide more in the mere ascendancy of political morality; for this morality only having to keep in order the part of society represented by those who have property, the task would not be difficult. But among us, where happily all men, without any distinction, are subject to the yoke of the law, an authority so extensive, must necessarily be strengthened and seconded by the universal influence of religious opinions.

I shall conclude this part of my subject by one reflexion more: supposing, even in the sovereign authority, an exertion sufficiently general to prevent or repress evil, religion would still have this great advantage, that it inculcates the beneficent virtues, which the laws cannot reach: and yet, in the actual state of society, it is become impossible to omit those virtues. It is not sufficient to be just, when the laws of property reduce to bare necessities the most numerous class of men, whose weak resources the most

trivial accident disconcerts. And I hesitate not to say, that such is the extreme inequality established by these laws, that we ought at present to consider the spirit of beneficence and forbearance, as constituting a part of social order ; as in all places and times, it softens by its assistance the excess of wretchedness, and by an innumerable multitude of springs, spreads itself, as the vital juice, through forlorn beings, whom misery had almost exhausted. But if this spirit, properly intermediate between the rigour of civil rights, and the original title of humanity, did not exist, or should ever be extinct, we should see all the subordinate ties relax imperceptibly : and a man, loaded with the favours of fortune, never presenting himself to the people under the form of a benefactor ; they would more forcibly feel the great extent of his privileges, and would accustom themselves to discuss them. Men must then find a way of moderating the despotism of fortune, or render homage to religion, which, by the sublime idea of an exchange between the blessings of heaven and earth, obliges the rich to give what the laws cannot demand.

Religion then comes continually to assist the civil legislation. It speaks a language unknown to the laws. It warms that sensibility which ought to advance even before reason. It acts like light and interior warmth ; as it both enlightens and animates : and what we have not sufficiently observed, is, that in society its moral sentiments are the imperceptible tie of a number of parts, which seem to be held by their own agreement, and which would be successively detached, if the chain, which united them, were ever to be broken. We shall more clearly perceive this truth, in the examination we are going to make, of the connexion of opinion with morality.

When we imagine we should be able to subject men to the observance of public order, and inspire them with the love of virtue, by motives independent of religion, we propose, undoubtedly, to put in action two powerful springs—the desire of esteem and praise—and the fear of contempt and shame. Thus, to follow my subject in all its branches, I ought necessarily to examine what is the degree of force of these different motives, and what is also their true application. I have already spoken, in other works of mine, of the opinion of the world, and of its salutary effects; but the subject I am now treating, obliges me to consider it under a different point of view, and it is by placing myself behind the scene, that I shall be able to fulfil this task.

I remark, at first, that the opinion of the world exercises its influence in a very confined space; as it is particularly called in to judge men, whose rank and employments have some splendor in the world. The opinion of the public is an approbation or censure, exercised in the name of the general interest; thus it ought only to be applied to actions and to words, which either directly or indirectly affect this interest. The private conduct of him who discharges in society the most important functions, is indeed submitted to the judgment and superintendence of the public at large: and we ought not to wonder that it should; since in similar circumstances the principles of an individual appear an earnest, or preface of his public virtues. But all those, whose sole occupation is to spend their income, those who are entirely devoted to dissipation, and have not any connexion with the grand interests of the community, become independent of the opinion of the world; or at least they do not experience its severity, till, by foolish extravagance or inconsiderate pretensions,

they draw the attention of the public on their conduct. In short, a great number of men, who, by the obscurity of their condition and moderate fortune, find themselves lost in a crowd, will never dread a power that singles out of the ranks its heroes and victims. Thus people, concealed under humble roofs, scattered in the country, are as indifferent to the opinion of the world, as are, to the rays of the sun, those unhappy tribes, who labour at the bottom of mines, and pass their whole lives in dark subterraneous caverns.

We cannot, then, form any kind of comparison between the peculiar ascendancy of reputation, and the general influence of religious morality.

Fame only recompenses rare actions; and would have nothing to bestow on a nation of heroes. Religion tends continually to render virtue common; but the universal success of its instructions would take away nothing from the value of its benefits.

In order to receive the rewards which fame bestows, men must appear with splendor on the stage of life. Religion, on the contrary, extends its most distinguished favours to those who despise praise, and who do good in secret.

The world almost always requires, that talents and knowledge should accompany virtue: and it is thus, that the love of praise becomes the seed and spring of great actions. Religion never imposes this condition. Its recompenses belong to the ignorant as well as the learned, to the humble spirit as well as to the exalted genius; and it is in animating equally all men, in exciting universal activity, that it effectually concurs to the maintenance of civil order.

The world, only judging of actions in their state of maturity, takes not any account of efforts: and, as men do not seize the palm till the moment when

they approach the goal, it is necessary, at the commencement of the career, that every one should derive from his own force his courage and perseverance. \ Religion, on the contrary, if I may say so, dwells with us from the moment that we begin to think. It welcomes our intentions; strengthens our resolutions; and supports us even in the hour of temptation. At all times, and in all situations, we experience its influence, as we are continually reminded of its rewards. \

Fame distributing only favours, whose principal value arises from comparisons and competitions, often draws on its favourites the envenomed breath of slander, and then sometimes they doubt about their real value. Religion mingles no bitterness with its reward. It is in obscurity that it confers content: and as it has treasures for all the world, what is granted to some, never impoverishes others.

The world is often mistaken in its judgment; because in the midst of so vast a circle, it is often difficult to distinguish true merit, and the splendor which follows it, from the false colours of hypocrisy. Religion extends its influence to the inmost recesses of the heart; and places there an observer, who has a closer view of men than their actions afford, and whom they cannot either deceive or surprise.

In short, I will say, there are moments, when the opinion of the world loses its force, and becomes enervated or governed by a servile spirit; it searches to find faults in the oppressed; and attributes grand intentions to powerful men, that it may, without shame, abandon one, and celebrate the other. Ah! it is in such moments we return with delight to the precepts of religion, to those independent principles, which, while they illustrate every thing deserving of esteem or contempt, enable us to follow the dictates

of our heart, and speak according to our conscience!

Thus, the opinion of the world, whose influence I have seen increase, which unites so many motives to excite men to distinguished actions, and to exalt them even to the great virtues, still ought never to be compared with the universal, invariable influence of religion, and with those sentiments with which its precepts inspire men of all ages, of all conditions, and every degree of understanding.

Would it be straying from my subject, to remark here the illusion we are under, if we expect any important utility to arise from those marks of distinction lately introduced into France, under the name of public rewards for virtue? Those trivial favours of opinion can never be decreed but to a few dispersed actions; and it might be apprehended, that if we rendered such institutions permanent and general, they might turn the attention of the people at large from the grand recompense, which ought to be the spring and encouragement of all that is great and virtuous. Experienced hunters, at the moment when all the pack is still pursuing the most noble ranger of the forest, would not permit them to turn, to run after a prey which darted out of a lurking hole or thicket.

The establishments, on which I here fix my attention, have, perhaps, also the inconvenience of rousing a sentiment of surprise at the appearance of a good action, and announcing thus too distinctly, that they believe it rare, and above the common exertions of humanity: and if we extended still further these institutions, they would only introduce a spirit of parade, always ready to languish, when applause was distant: and it would be a great misfortune, if such a spirit ever took place of simple and modest integrity, which receives from itself its motives

and reward. Virtue and vanity make a bad mixture ; men are then accustomed only to act to be seen ; and these opportunities, at present not very numerous, they wish to choose. There is, besides, a class of men so ill treated by fortune, that we should commit a great mistake in habituating them to connect continually calculations of probable rewards from men, with the practice of their duty ; they would too often be deceived.

It is, then—we cannot too often repeat it—it is respect for morality, which it is necessary to maintain, by strengthening religious principles, its most solid foundation. All other extraordinary helps derive their force from novelty : and at the period, when society would have the greatest need of their succour, it would, perhaps, have arrived at its greatest depravity.

Thus far at present, I have considered the influence of opinion, only in general : but men manifest more in a private manner, the idea that they have conceived of each other : and this sentiment, which takes then the simple name of esteem, is connected with a determinate knowledge of the moral character of those with whom we have an habitual correspondence. Esteem, under this view, has not the splendor of reputation : but as every one can pretend to it in the circle where his birth and occupations have placed him, the hope of obtaining it ought to be reckoned among the grand motives which excite us to the observance of morality. However, if we supposed that this esteem was entirely separated from religious sentiments, it would be like many other advantages, which every one would estimate by his own fancy ; for whatever comes solely from men, can only have a price relative to our connexion with them. Thus the esteem of one, or of several per-

sons, would not indemnify for such a sacrifice ; and often also this sentiment, on their part, would appear inferior to some other objects of ambition. In a word, from the moment every preference, every valuation was brought to a standard, each would insensibly have his own book of rates : and the justness of them would depend on the degree of judgment and foresight of every individual. But how can we imagine, that perfection in morality would ever be secure, when it depended on wavering and arbitrary comparisons ; whose foundation would be continually changed by the various circumstances and situations of life ? The motives, which religion presents, are absolutely different. It is not by confused contrasts, that it directs men : it is a predominant interest to which they are recalled. It is round a beacon, of which the brilliant flames are seen on all sides, that they are assembled. In short, the rules which it prescribes, are not uncertain, and the advantages which it promises, do not admit of an equivalent.

Let us further observe here, that selfishness, after having compared the enjoyment of esteem with pleasures of a different kind, would not fail to reckon the chances which afford a hope of imposing on men : and in the midst of these perplexed calculations, the passion of the moment would be almost always victorious. Besides, we might ask, what is the esteem of others, to that numerous class, which misery makes solitary ? And what is it but a sentiment, of which the effect is never obvious, to those whose views are limited to the present day, or the next, because they only live by instantaneous resources ? All the advantages annexed to reputation are promissory notes, of which it is necessary to be able to wait the distant expiration. Reflexion and knowledge only acquaint us with their value ; and the ignorance of the greater

part of a nation would render them unequal to this kind of combination.

If, then, after having taken a view of the lowest, I observe those who compose the superior class, I will venture a reflexion of a very different kind; that in a country, where we have the hope of obtaining the most splendid marks of distinction, and where fame has power to raise heroes, great ministers, and men of genius in every profession, we do not find that the duties of private life are best known and the most respected. Men, uniting to celebrate with ardour great talents and actions, consider with more indifference the morals and manners of individuals. They make an ideal beauty, composed of every thing which contributes to the celebrity of their country and the honour of their nation. But by accustoming themselves to refer every thing to these interests, they become extremely negligent with respect to common virtues, and sometimes they even decide, that the rare qualities of the mind may absolutely dispense with them. Besides, if fame can serve to reward the most assiduous labour and painful self-denial, it is far from being necessary, that moderate sentiments of esteem should indemnify those who obtain them, for the sacrifice of their passions. It does not follow, that this sentiment should give them strength to resist the multiplied seductions, that the hopes of ambition and the chances of fortune present to our view: and this consideration acquires more force in a kingdom, where, among the distinctions of which the favour of the prince is the origin, there are some which attract so much homage, that they resemble fame itself.

In short, and what I am going to say comprehends, in a general manner, the various questions which I have just treated: the esteem of men, even when

this sentiment seems the most foreign to religion, receives, nevertheless, from thence its principal strength, and even origin. It is a reflexion of great importance, and of which I will endeavour to demonstrate the truth.

We ought, at first, to ask what is the original principle of society, which gives weight to the various expressions of the sentiment of esteem. We shall find, undoubtedly, that it is a distinct idea of the duties of men, a notion of good morals, as general as firm. Now, the duties of life cannot be fulfilled, without the assistance of religion; since the connexion of private and public interest, the only foundation of the virtues of our framing, is, as we have demonstrated, an imperfect system, and susceptible of a multitude of exceptions, or arbitrary interpretations. It is necessary, then, that our social obligations should be fixed in an authentic manner, if we wish that our judgment, and the sentiments we adopt, should be a real indication of the relation the conduct of men has with moral perfection. But, if this perfection were only determined by human conventions—if it were despoiled of the majesty which religion invests it with—reputation, and sentiments of esteem, which are the pledge and stamp of good morals, would insensibly lose their value. We should then recollect that coin, which some vainly wished to preserve the current value of in commerce, after having materially altered either the weight or the standard: and, in effect, to follow the simile a moment longer, how could we alter the essence of morality more, and lessen the respect which is due to it, than by separating it from the sublime motives which religion presents, to unite it only to political considerations?

One objection I ought to obviate. It may be said,

perhaps, that the influence of honour in the army, seems to be a proof, that reputation, without the aid of any other impulse, would have sufficient influence, to direct the mind to the end which we propose to ourselves. This objection does not appear to me decisive. Honour in armies preserves a great ascendancy; because, among men thus assembled, it is impossible to escape shame, and the punishment incurred by cowardice. It is in war that the power of authority and that of fame unite all their forces; because they exercise their influence on men engaged in one action, actuated by the same spirit, by that singular subordination, termed discipline. Thus, when in the commencement of the Roman republic, the army participated more of the air of the city, and was not yet familiarized to the military yoke, it was then only through the sanction of an oath, supported by religious sentiments, that the general contrived to prevent the inconstancy and defection of those who followed him to the camp. Whatever, therefore, may be at present, the power of honour in armies—whatever at present may be its influence in the field of battle, where the actors, spectators, and judges, are on the same stage, and have nothing else to do but to practise, remark, and praise a particular virtue—we should not be able to draw any deduction from it, applicable to the social relations, whose extent is immense, and to whose diversity there is no bound. Besides, military honour is very far from being foreign to the general principles of morality, and consequently to religious opinions, the most solid support of those principles; for sentiments which contain, in some manner, the idea of a noble sacrifice, would lose a considerable part of their force, if the great basis of our duty were ever shaken.

A perfect model is necessary to fix the admira-

tion of men : and it is only by an intercourse more or less constant with that first model, that several opinions, which seem, in appearance, to arise merely from convenience, have consistency.

However, there has resulted from our warlike customs, an opinion purely social, which is very powerful : it is that of the point of honour, when we consider it in its singular and simple acceptation, when a man is ready to sacrifice his life to guard himself from the slightest humiliation. This opinion, it is true, only dictates its rules among equals : and the exercise of its authority extends to an inconsiderable part of a nation, which, wholly given up to worldly concerns, are occupied entirely with comparisons and distinctions : it is one of the ancient appendages of military honour, and in uniting all its force towards a single idea, it is become a simple principle, which has been blindly transmitted and as blindly respected.

It is by the effect of a similar habit, that savages affix all their glory to a contempt of bodily pain, and to demonstrations of gaiety, in the midst of the most cruel torments. Can we doubt, that their supernatural exultation would not be weakened, at the very instant they were acquainted with our most common ideas of virtue ? likewise our idea of honour, which, in its exaggerated state, resembles their death songs, would not resist metaphysical arguments, if ever metaphysics became our sole guide in morality : for after having analyzed the motives of our most important obligations, we should analyze also our fine-spun sentiment, which makes us regardless of danger. Yes, if respect for religion were absolutely destroyed—if this simple opinion, which carries with it so many obligations, and serves to defend so many duties, had no other support—the idea of ho-

nour would soon be weakened : and our personal interest, insensibly disengaged from all the ties of the imagination, would take a character so rude, and so determined, that our habitual impressions, and our relation with others, would be absolutely changed.

Permit me then to make another reflexion : it will be always easy to subject men to a governing opinion, when they themselves, and those who govern them, unite all their efforts to attain the same end. But, if this governing opinion be not, like religion, the general principle of our conduct—if it cannot give us laws in the different situations of life—it would serve only to throw us out of an equilibrium, or, at least, its utility would be partial and momentary. Nevertheless, if, with a design of remedying this inconvenience, we searched to multiply these opinions, they would weaken each other ; for every time we wish strongly to restrain the imagination, it is necessary, that a single idea, a single authority, a single object of interest, should engage the attention of men. Perfection, in this respect, is the choice of a single principle, whose consequence extends to all : and such is the particular merit of religious opinions.

We can then, in the name of reason, of policy, and philosophy, demand some respect for them. And I ought to repeat, since it is time for me to resume my subject, that esteem or contempt, honour or shame, are so far from being able to supply the place of the active influence of religion, that its sentiments confirm the opinion of the world, and, more or less, obviously direct it. It follows, that we should soon reason shrewdly, on the value which we ought to set on the esteem of the world, if the expression of its approbation were not united, in our contemplation, to something more noble than the

judgment of mankind, and if an awful respect for virtue were not imbibed by means of a religious education. We should soon experience, that, in wishing to found every thing on the calculations of worldly wisdom, these same calculations would destroy all : and morality having at once lost its grand support, we should try in vain to prop it by a scaffold of laws, and the vain efforts of an opinion without a guide. Hypocrisy and dissimulation would become immediately a necessary science—a legitimate defence, which would weary the attention of every inspector : and testimonies of esteem appearing only an ingenious encouragement granted to the sacrifices of selfishness—the applause, decreed to a generous mode of conduct, would be insensibly discredited by those who gave, and by those received them ; and would end, perhaps, in becoming a secret object of derision, as mere play from one to another.

Every thing is replaced and firmly established by religion. It surrounds, I may say, the whole system of morality, resembling that universal and mysterious force of physical nature, which retains the planets in their orbits, and subjects them to a regular revolution ; and which, in the midst of the general order it maintains, escapes the observation of men, and appears to their feeble sight unconscious of its own work.

THIRD CHAPTER.

An objection drawn from our natural dispositions to goodness.

MEN, according to the opinion of some, have received from nature a secret tendency towards every thing just, good, and virtuous : and from this happy inclination, the task of the moralist is confined

to prevent the alteration of our original constitution : an easy task, add they, and which may be fulfilled without any extraordinary effort, and without having recourse to religion.

We ought, at first, to observe, that the existence of this excellent innate goodness has been a long time a subject of debate ; as every assertion always will be, of which we cannot demonstrate the truth, either by argument or experience. We shall never be able to perceive distinctly the natural dispositions of men, since, to our view, they are never separated from the improvement, or the modification, which they owe to education and habit. One or two examples they produce of children, arrived at maturity, found in a forest. But we are ignorant at what precise age they were abandoned by their parents, and what might have been their dispositions, if, brought back to society, they had not been guided by instruction, or restrained by fear and subordination. It is not very probable, that man derived from his original nature all the dispositions which lead to goodness : such a thought agrees not with his pride or dignity ; since the intellectual faculties, with which he is endowed, the power he has of gradually tending to perfection, announce to him, that he ought to fulfil his career with the assistance of reason, and that, very different from those beings governed by an invariable instinct, he should elevate himself as much above them, by cultivating the abilities entrusted to him, as by the grandeur of the destiny to which he is permitted to aspire.

Reason, however, our faithful guide, would be insufficient to attach us to sentiments of order, justice, and beneficence, were it not seconded by a nature proper to receive the impression of every noble sentiment. But such reflexions, far from fa-

pouring any system of independence or impiety, receive from religious opinions their principal force. What is, in effect, in this respect the course of our thoughts? We attribute, at first, to a Supreme and Universal Being all the perfections which seem to constitute his essence: and from this principle we are led to presume, that we, his intelligent creatures, and his most noble work, participate, in some manner, of the Divine Spirit, of which we are an emanation. But if we could ever be persuaded, that our confidence in the idea of a God is a deceitful illusion, we should not have any reason to believe, that the mere child of nature, blind and without a guide, would be disposed to good, rather than evil. We must derive our opinion of innate goodness from a secret sentiment, and from a perfect conviction of the existence of a power which keeps every thing in order, the model of all perfection. But, as we obtain equally from this power, the faculties which render us capable of acquiring knowledge, of improving by experience, of extending our views into futurity, and elevating our thoughts to God; we should not know how to distinguish these last expedients of ability and virtue from those which belong to our first instinct: and we have no interest in doing it.

That, which we perceive most clearly, is, that there is a correspondence, a harmony between all the parts of our moral nature: and therefore we cannot deny the existence of our natural inclination towards goodness, nor consider this inclination as a disposition which has not need of any religious sentiment to acquire strength, and become a rational conductor through the rough road of life. The production of salutary fruits requires, before all things, a favourable soil. But this advantage would

be useless without seed and the labour of the husbandman, and the fertilizing warmth of the sun. The Author of nature has thought fit, that a great number of causes should concur continually to renovate the productions of the earth; and the same intention, the same plan, seems to have determined the principle and the developement of all the gifts of the mind. It is necessary, in order to attach intelligent beings to the love of virtue, and respect for morality, that not only happy natural dispositions, but still more, a judicious education, good laws, and above all, a continual intercourse with the Supreme Being (from which alone can arise firm resolutions, and every ardent thought) should concur: but men, ambitious of submitting a great number of relations to their weak comprehension, would wish to confine them to a few causes. We shall discover, every moment, the truth of this observation. Actuated by a similar motive, many wish to attribute every thing to education; while others pretend, that our natural dispositions are the only source of our actions and intentions, of our vices and virtues. Perhaps, in fact, there is, in the universe, but one expedient and spring, one prolific idea, the root of every other: yet, as it is at the origin of this idea, and not in its innumerable developements, that its unity can be perceived, the first grand disposer of nature only ought to be in possession of the secret: and we, who see, of the immense mechanism of the world, but a few wheels, become almost ridiculous, when we make choice sometimes of one, and sometimes of another, to refer to it exclusively, the cause of motion, and the simplest properties of the different parts of the natural or moral world.

FOURTH CHAPTER.

An objection drawn from the good conduct of many irreligious men.

YOU may think, perhaps, after having read the preceding chapter, that I have taken little room to treat a question, on which so much has been written : but if it be allowed, that I have made some approaches to truth, I shall not need any excuse. The researches after truth resemble those circles which we trace sometimes one round another ; the furthest from the centre has necessarily the greatest extent.

I will then endeavour, with the same brevity, to examine the objection which is to make the subject of this chapter.

Society, some say, is at present full of persons, who, to borrow the expression of the times, are absolutely disengaged from every kind of prejudice—who believe not even the existence of a Supreme Being ; and yet, their conduct appears as regular as that of the most religious men.

Before replying to this objection, I ought to make an important observation. The detractors of a religious spirit habitually confound, in their discourse, devotion and piety. They attribute, besides, to devotion an exaggerated sense, which its natural definition will not bear ; and derive from this misconception a great advantage. Piety, simple in its sentiments and deportment, commonly escapes the heedless glance of a man of the world : and the greater part of those who speak of it, would have some difficulty to delineate it well. Devotion, on the contrary, such as we are accustomed to represent, seems

to attach some value to appearances. It displays itself: it makes a parade of the austerity of its principles: and often, soured by the sacrifices, or the constraint, which it has imposed on itself as a law, it contracts a rough and inflexible spirit, which banishes sentiment, amiable and indulgent. In short, devotion is sometimes mixed with hypocrisy: and then it is only a despicable assemblage of the most contemptible vices. It is easy to judge, from these two pictures, that judicious piety, rational and indulgent, forms the true characteristic of a religious spirit, considered in its purity. It is then with morality, inspired by a like spirit, that it is necessary to compare those men, who are guided only by the principles they frame to themselves: and I believe, that one of these two systems of morality is far superior to the other. But we run a risk of deceiving ourselves in our observations, when we do not extend them beyond the narrow circle, known among us by the name of *society*. Men, in the circumscribed relations which arise from the communications of idleness and dissipation, require of each other, only qualities applicable to this kind of relations. Their code of laws is very short. Integrity in the commerce of life, constancy in friendship, or, at least, politeness in their intercourse, a kind of elevation in their discourse and manner—in short, probity is the grand outline: and this is all that is required, in order to display ourselves to the best advantage, in the midst of the active scenes which surround us, where we sometimes form a confederacy proper to serve as a support of the great virtues. But what they wish for, before every thing, is, a grant of indulgence in favour of vices, which do not disturb the order or the peace of their pleasures; and which only render parents, husbands, and creditors, vassals, and the commonalty

unhappy. Far distant, indeed, from a like tolerance, are those collective obligations which morality dictates—obligations of which I made a concise sketch, when I compared them with those which are imposed by civil laws. It is then only, after having ourselves retraced the entire system of our duties—it is only after having compared them with the conventions softened by fashionable society, that we are in a state to judge, if the conduct of persons, disengaged from every religious tie, ought to be given as an example, and if their morality can suffice for all the circumstances of life.

But in admitting, for a moment, this supposition, we should not have a right to draw any deduction contrary to the truths which I have endeavoured to establish; for all those, who free themselves at a certain age, from the yoke of religion, have been at least prepared by it to respect virtue. Principles, inculcated early in life, have a great influence on the human heart, a long time even after our understanding has rejected the reasoning which served as the basis of those principles. The soul, formed, when the reason begins to dawn, to the love of order, and sustained in this disposition by the force of habit, never entirely loses this principle. So that, whatever be the opinions adopted when the judgment is formed, it is slowly, and by degrees, that these opinions act on the character and direct the conduct. Besides, while religion maintains among the greater number of men, a profound respect for morality—those, who reject these sentiments, know, nevertheless, that probity leads to esteem, and to the various advantages which depend on it. Of course, a virtuous atheist merely makes us recollect, that he lives where virtue is respected: and it is not the inefficacy, but, on the contrary, the indirect influence of

religious opinions, which his conduct demonstrates to me. I think I see, in a beautiful piece of mechanism, a small part broken off from the chain, and which maintains its place, by the force still subsisting of general equilibrium.

What ! would you have need of religion, to be an honest man ? Here is an interrogative, with which they hope to embarrass those who wish to preserve to morality its best support ; and the dread, that some have, of not giving an honourable idea of their sentiments, induces them to reply with quickness, that certainly they should not need the check of religion, and that the dictates of their heart would always be sufficient to direct them. This answer is undoubtedly very respectable. But for my part, I avow, I should merely say, that virtue has so many charms, when it has been a long time practised, that a truly sensible man would continue to be just, even when every religious sentiment was annihilated ; but that it is uncertain, whether, with a political education, his principles might have been the same : and I should add further, that no one, perhaps, could be certain, that he would have sufficient strength to resist a revolution of ideas, similar to those that we have just supposed, were he to fall at the same time into a state of misery and dejection, which would make him revolt at the enjoyments and the triumphs of others. It is always in a like situation, that it is necessary to place ourselves, to judge properly of certain questions ; for all those, who enjoy the favours of fortune, have, in consequence of this fortunate condition, fewer objects of envy, and are less subject to temptations : and in the midst of the different comforts, which peaceably surround them, it is not the principles of others, of which they know the want.

As for philosophical writers, if it were among them,

that we are to search for the principal defenders of the new opinions—and if, at the same time, their moral conduct were cited as an example—we should have to observe, that a retired life, love of study, and a constant habit of reflexion, ought to spread a kind of calm over their sentiments. Besides, delivered up to abstraction, or pre-occupied by general ideas, they know not all the passions, and they are seldom personally engaged in those ardent pursuits which stimulate society. They cannot then determine, with certainty, what would have been the degree of their resisting force, if, without any other defensive arms, than their principles, and no guide but convenience, they had to combat against the allurements of fortune and ambition, which present themselves in every step of our worldly career. They have, also, like all the inventors and the propagators of a new system, vanity, which engages them to multiply the number of their disciples: and how, in fact, could they be able to flatter themselves with any success, if, in attacking the most respectable opinions, they had not endeavoured to prove that their doctrines were not in opposition to morality? Besides, it is very necessary, after having silently sapped the foundation of our dwelling, that they support for some time the edifice, were it only while they have with us a common habitation—were it only during the interval when we should be able to judge in their presence, of the utility of their instructions. In short, very often, perhaps, the dupes of their own heart, they have been induced to believe, that, because they were at the same time irreligious by system, and just by character and habit, religion and virtue have not a necessary union; and if it be true, that in the grand interests of life, the slightest doubt has some influence on our actions, would it be possible, that at the time

when they would seek to shake religious opinions, even when they are ridiculed in conversation, they would still endeavour to preserve a secret connexion with them, by the propriety of their conduct? It is thus, that, in the disputes of princes, or in the quarrels of ministers, the members of the same family have sometimes the art of dividing themselves, in order, at all events, that one of their friends shall be in each party.

These different reflexions ought necessarily to be taken into consideration, before we give ourselves up to the inferences that they would wish to draw from the manners of irreligious men. But, to discredit their arguments, it is sufficient to observe, that we cannot make any application of them to the most numerous class of men. Honest atheists have never existed among the commonalty : religion comprehends all their knowledge in morality : and if once they were to lose this guide, their conduct would be absolutely dependent on chance and circumstances.

It is still essential to observe, that, according to the motives to which we can attribute the relaxation of moral principles, there exists a great difference between the various characters which attend vicious actions. A depraved man, though religious, does wrong by accident, through weakness, and according to the successive transports of his passions. But the wicked atheist has not a fixed time ; opportunities do not surprise him : he searches for them, or waits for them with impatience. He yields not through the contagion of imitation : but he takes pleasure in setting an example. He is not a corrupt fruit : he is himself the tree of evil.

Another objection is raised, but of a very different kind. They point out the contrast, frequently perceived, between the conduct and the religious senti-

ments of the greater part of men ; an opposition from whence they would wish to conclude, that these sentiments are not a certain safeguard : and they add, to support their argument, that in examining the belief of all those, whose licentious life is terminated by an ignominious death, we perceive that the greater number is composed of people blindly subject to religious opinions.

Undoubtedly, these opinions form not, at all times, a complete resistance to the different starts of our passions : but it suffices, that they may be the most efficacious. There have been, and there ever will be, vicious men in the bosom of society, even where religion has the greatest influence ; for it acts not on us like a mechanical force, by weights, levers, and springs, of which we can calculate exactly the power. It is not an arbitrary modification of our nature : but we are enlightened, guided, and animated, according to our dispositions and sensibility, and according to the degree of our own efforts in the numerous conflicts which we have to sustain. It would be then an evident piece of treachery, to attack religion, by drawing a picture of the vices and crimes, from which it has not been able to guard society, instead of fixing our attention on all the disorders which it checks or prevents.

They are equally wrong, who represent the general languor of religion, as a proof that it has, in our time, very little influence on morality. It would be necessary rather to remark, how great must have been that power, which, even in the decline of its force, is still sufficient to concur to the maintenance of public order. We should be authorized to say, how valuable is the whole, when we receive so much advantage from a part?

In short, the consequence that they would wish to

draw from the opinions, and from the faith of wretches sinking under the sword of justice, is an abuse of reasoning. Men termed religious, forming the major part of the populace, we must among them necessarily meet the greater number of malefactors; in the same manner that we are sure to find, in this class, more men of a particular age, stature, or complexion. But, if they have a right to use such an argument to censure a religious education, they might, with the same reason, contest the salubrity of breast milk, alleging, that many sick and dying persons have received this nourishment. We should never confound a common circumstance with a general cause; these are two ideas absolutely distinct.

There are other objections, which equally deserve to be discussed: but they will find a place, with more propriety, after the chapter, where I shall examine, under different heads, the influence of religious opinions on our happiness. You have seen, and you will perceive still more, in the progress of this work, that I do not endeavour to elude difficulties; for before I determined to defend, according to my abilities, a cause which I could wish to render dear to mankind, I carefully studied the means: and after having fortified myself against the systems opposite to my sentiments, I fear not to examine the motives which serve to support them.

F I F T H C H A P T E R.

The influence of religious principles on our happiness.

AS we have shown the close connexion of morality with religious opinions, we have already pointed out the principal relation of these opinions with public good; since the repose and interior tran-

quillity of society essentially depend on the maintenance of civil order, and the exact observance of the laws of justice. But a great part of human happiness does not arise from the community : thus, the benefits religion imparts would be very imperfect, if they were not extended to our most intimate sentiments—if they were not useful in those secret conflicts of different affections, which agitate our souls, and which preoccupy our thoughts. Religion is very far from deserving this reproach. That, which raises it indeed above every kind of legislation, is, that it influences equally public good and private happiness. We ought to examine this truth : but to do it philosophically, we must necessarily contemplate, and pry into our nature, and examine, for a moment, into the first causes of the enjoyments or the anxieties of our minds.

Men, when they have advanced a few steps in the world, and as soon as their intellectual faculties begin to open, extend their views, and live in the future. Sensual pleasures and bodily pain only detain them in the present. But in the long intervals, which exist between the renewal of these sensations, it is by anticipation and memory that they are happy or miserable : and recollection is only interesting, as it is perceived to keep up the connexion between the past and future. Undoubtedly, the influence of the future, on all our moral affections, often escapes our notice. To cite some examples of this truth, we believe that only the present moment produces happiness, when we receive eulogiums, obtain some mark of distinction, or are informed of an unexpected augmentation of our fortune ; and still more, when we are pleased with the sport of our imagination, or the discoveries of our reason in our closet or in conversation. These enjoyments, and many others similar,

we call present happiness; though there is not any one of them, which does not owe its value, and even reality, to the single idea of futurity. In fact, respect, applause, the triumphs of self-love, the fore-runners of fame, and even fame itself, are the acquisitions which education and habit have rendered precious, in exhibiting always beyond them some other advantage, of which these first were only the symbols. Often, indeed, the last object of our ambition is but an enjoyment of opinion, the confused image of some possession more real. Every where we see vague hopes hurry away our imagination. We see the expected good, the immediate end of our meditation, or the obscure motive of the estimation we annex to the various satisfactions of which our present happiness is composed. Thus, indirectly, and almost unknown to ourselves, all is in perspective in our moral existence: and it is by this reasoning that, always deluded, we are seldom perfectly deceived. Subjected by long habit, it is in vain that we would wish to separate the imaginary advantages of opinion from the delusions of hope which surround them, and by which we have been seduced all our life.

There is but a small part of the moral system, which we cannot make agree with this manner of explaining the principal cause of our pleasures and of our pains. I am very far, however, from wishing to make the sentiments, which unite men by the charm of friendship, depend on the same principle; and which have such an essential influence on their happiness. All is real in these affections; since they are a simple association of ourselves to others, and them to us: in this view it may be considered as, in some measure, prolonging our own existence: but this division, so intimate of the good and evil of life, does not destroy their essence. Friendship doubles

our pleasures and our comforts: and it is by the close alliance of two sympathizing souls, that we are fortified against all events. But it is always with the same passions that it is necessary to combat; thus, whether we remain solitary, or live in others, the future preserves its influence over us.

If such be, however, our moral nature, that the object of our wishes will always be at some distance—if our thoughts, like the course of the waves, be ever active, and pressing forward—if our present enjoyments have a secret tie with the imaginary advantages of opinion, of which the last term is still a fleeting shadow—in short, if all be future in the fate of man; with what interest, with what love, with what respect, ought we not to consider this beautiful system of hope, of which religious opinions are the majestic foundation? What encouragement they present! What an end to all other ends! What a grand and precious idea, by its connexion with the most intimate and general sentiment, the desire of prolonging our existence! That, which men dread most, is the image of an eternal annihilation. The absolute destruction of all the faculties which compose their being, is for them the downfall of the whole universe: and they are anxious to seek for a refuge against this overwhelming thought.

Undoubtedly, it is according to nature, according to the degree of strength of their religious opinions, that men seize, with more or less confidence, the hopes which they give, and the recompense they promise. But doubt and obscurity have a powerful action, while supreme happiness is the object; for even in the affairs of this life, the grandeur of the prize, offered to our ambition, excites still more our ardour, than the probability of success. But where should we fix—where attach the slightest hope—if

even the idea of a God, this first prop of religion, were ever destroyed—if, from the infancy of men, we did not present to their reflexion, that worldly considerations are as transient as themselves—and if, early in life, they were humbled in their own eyes---if men applied themselves to stifle the internal sentiments, which inform them of the spirituality of their souls? Discouraged in this manner by the first principles of their education, slackened in all the movements which carry their reflexions into futurity, they would often take retrospective views. The past recalling an irreparable loss, would too much captivate their attention : and their minds, in the midst of time, would no more be in a necessary equilibrium to enjoy the present moment. In short, this moment, which is not, in reality, but an imperceptible fraction, would appear almost nothing to our eyes, if it were not united in our contemplations, to the unknown number of days and years which are before us. It is then, because there is nothing limited in the idea of happiness and duration, with which religious sentiments impress us, that our imagination is not forced to recoil on itself, when it is insensibly lost in the immensity of futurity.

When, in following the course of a noble river, a vast horizon is presented to our view, we turn not our observation on the sandy banks we are coasting. But if, changing our situation, or twilight narrowing this horizon, our attention were turned on the barren flat we are near ; then only we should remark all its dryness and sterility. It is the same in the career of life. When the grand ideas of infinity elevate our thoughts and our hopes, we are less affected by the weariness and difficulties strewed in our path. But if, changing our principles, a gloomy philosophy were to obscure our perspective, our whole

attention being drawn back on the surrounding objects, we should then very distinctly discover the void and illusion of the satisfactions of which our moral nature is susceptible.

Let us recollect, then, all the happiness which we owe to religious sentiments and obvious reflexions, which, in attracting us continually towards the future, seem willing to save from the present moment the purest part of ourselves; these are, without our perceiving it, the enchantments of the moral world. If it were possible, that, by cold reasoning, we at length destroyed them, a sad melancholy would ally itself to most of our reflexions: and it would seem as if a winding-sheet had taken place of that transparent veil, through which the prospects of life are embellished. Undoubtedly there would be still some charm in the days of youth, when the pleasures of the senses press on us, and fill a considerable time: but when the passions are tempered by age—when our strength has been broken by years, or prematurely attacked by sickness—in short, when the time is arrived, in which men are constrained to seek, in the principles of morality, the chief support of their happiness—what would become of them, if those hopes and opinions were dissipated, which afford solid comfort and encouragement: and if an imagination, thus active, were weakened, which enlivens all the objects that anticipation can reach?

Reflect, then, with attention, on the different consequences which would be the fatal train of the annihilation of religious opinions. It is not a single idea, a single view, that men would lose: it would be, besides, the interest and charm of all their desires and ambition. There is nothing indifferent, when our actions and designs can be in any respect attached to a duty. There is nothing indifferent,

when the exercise and the improvement of our faculties appear the commencement of an existence, whose termination is unknown : but, when this period offers itself on all sides to our view—when we approach it every moment, what strong illusion would be sufficient to defend us from a sad despondency ? Strictly circumscribed in the space of life, its limits would be in such a manner present to our mind, to every sentiment and enterprise, perhaps, that we should be tempted to examine, what it is, that can merit, on our part, an assiduous research—what it is, that deserves close and painful application. Indeed, fame itself, which is called immortal, would no more hurry us on in the same manner, if we had a secret conviction, that it cannot grow, rise, subsist, but in such portions of space, and such durations of time, as our imagination cannot conceive. It is necessary, that the uncertain future be still our country, in order that we should be able to feel that unquiet love of a long celebrity, and those ardent impulses towards great things, which are the salutary effect of it.

We deceive ourselves, then, I think, when we accuse religion of necessarily rendering the business and the pleasures of the world uninteresting. Its chief pleasures, on the contrary, are derived from religion—from those ideas of eternity, which it presents to our mind, which serve to sustain the enchantments of hope, and the sense of those duties, of which our moral nature is ingeniously composed,

Religious opinions are perfectly adapted to our nature, to our weaknesses and perfections. They come to our succour in our real difficulties, and in those which the abuse of our foresight creates. But in what is grand and elevated in our nature, it sympathizes most : for, if men be animated by noble

thoughts—if they respect their intelligence, their chief ornament—if they be interested about the dignity of their nature, they will fly with transport to bow before religion, which ennobles their faculties, preserves their strength of mind, and which, through its sentiments, unites them to him, whose power astonishes their understanding. It is then that, considering themselves as an emanation of the Infinite Being, the commencement of all things, they will not let themselves be drawn aside by a philosophy, whose sad lessons tend to persuade us, that reason, liberty, all this immaterial essence of ourselves, is the mere result of a fortuitous combination, and an harmony without intelligence.

We have never, perhaps, observed, with sufficient attention, the different kinds of happiness which would be destroyed, or at least sensibly weakened, if this discouraging doctrine were ever propagated.

What would then become of the most sublime of all sentiments, that of admiration, if, instead of the grand view of the universe, far from reviving the idea of a Supreme Being, we retraced only a vast existence, but without design, cause, or destination—and if the astonishment of our minds were itself but one of the spontaneous accidents of blind matter?

What would become of the pleasure which we find in the developement, exercise, and progress of our faculties, if this intelligence, of which we love to glory, were only the result of chance—and if all our ideas were but a mere obedience to the eternal law of motion—if our liberty were but a fiction---and if we had not, if I may say so, any possession of ourselves?

What would become, then, of that active spirit of curiosity, whose charm excites us to observe con-

tinually the wonders with which we are surrounded, and which inspires, at the same time, the desire of penetrating, in some measure, into the mystery of our existence, and the secret of our origin? Certainly, it would little avail us to study the course of nature, if this science could only teach us to comprehend the afflicting particulars of our mechanical slavery: a prisoner cannot be pleased to draw the form of his fetters, or reckon the links of his chains.

But how beautiful is the world, when it is represented to us as the result of a single and grand thought—and when we find, every where, the stamp of an eternal intelligence! and how pleasing to live with the sentiments of astonishment and adoration deeply impressed on our hearts!

But what a subject of glory are the endowments of the mind, when we can consider them as a participation of a sublime nature, of which God alone is the perfect model. And how delightful, then, to yield to the ambition of elevating ourselves still more, by exercising our thoughts and improving all our faculties.

In short, how many charms has the observation of nature, when, at every new discovery, we believe we advance a step towards an acquaintance with that exalted wisdom, which has prescribed laws to the universe, and maintains it in harmony! It is then, and only then, that the study is truly interesting, and the progress of knowledge becomes an increase of happiness. Yes, under the influence of opinions, arising from the notions of materialists---all is languishing in our curiosity---all is mere instinct in our admiration---all is fictitious in the sentiments which we have of ourselves: but with the idea of a God, all is lively, all is reasonable and true. In short, this happy and prolific idea appears as necessa-

ry to the moral nature of man, as heat is to plants and to all the vegetable world.

You may think, perhaps, that in examining the influence of religion on happiness, I have dwelt on several considerations, which are not of equal importance to all men: there are, indeed, some more particularly adapted to that part of society, whose minds are improved by education; but I am very far from wishing to divert a moment my attention from the numerous class of the inhabitants of the earth, whose happiness and misery arises from a simple idea, proportioned to the extent of their interests and reflexions.

Those, who seem to have a more pressing and constant need of the assistance of religion, have been left, by the misfortunes of their parents, to the wide world, devoid of property, and deprived also of those resources which depend on education. This class of men, condemned to hard labour, are, as it were, confined in a rough and uniformly barren path, where every day resembles the last, where they have not any confused expectations, or flattering illusion to divert them. They know that there is a wall of separation between them and fortune: and if they carried their views in life forward, they would only discover the dreadful state any infirmity would reduce them to—and the deplorable situation to which they might be exposed, by the cruel neglect which attends old age. With what transport, in this situation, would they not catch at the comfortable hopes which religion presents! With what satisfaction would they not learn, that after this probationary state, where so much disproportion overwhelms them, there would come a time of equality! What would be their complaints, if they were to renounce a sentiment which still conforms itself,

for their advantage, to a general idea, the only one, in short, of which they can make use in all events and circumstances of life. "It is God's will," they say to themselves, and this first thought supports their resignation. "God will recompense you, God will return it to you," say they to others, when they receive alms: and these words remind them, that the God of the rich and powerful is also theirs; and that, far from being indifferent to their fate, he deigns himself to discharge their obligations.

How many other popular expressions continually recal the same sentiment of confidence and consolation! It is this continual relation of the poor with the Deity, which raises them in their own eyes, and which prevents their sinking under the weight of contempt, with which they are oppressed, and gives them sometimes courage to resist the pride of earthly greatness. What grander effect could be produced by an idea so simple? Thus, among the different things which characterise religion, I remark, above all, what seems more particularly the seal of a divine hand: it is, that the moral advantages, of which religion is the source, resembling the grand blessings of nature, belong equally to all men: and, as the sun, in the distribution of its rays, observes neither rank nor fortune; so, in the same way, those comforting sentiments, which are connected with the conception of a Supreme Being, and the hopes united to it, become the property of the poor as well as the rich--of the weak as well as the powerful; and can be as securely enjoyed under the lowly roof of a cottage, as in a superb palace. It is civil laws, which increase, or give a sanction to the inequality of possessions: and it is religion which sweetens the bitterness of this hard disproportion.

We could not avoid feeling a compassion, as pain-

ful as well founded, if, in considering attentively the fate of the greater number of men, we supposed them all at one stroke deprived of the only thought which supported their courage. They would no more have a God to confide their sorrows with. They would no more attend his ordinances, to search for the sentiments of resignation and tranquillity. They would have no motive for raising their looks to heaven. Their eyes would be cast down, fixed forever on this abode of grief, of death, and eternal silence. Then despair would even stifle their groans: and all their reflexions preying on themselves, would only serve to corrode their hearts: then those tears, which they have a satisfaction in shedding, and which are attracted by the tender persuasion, that there exists some where commiseration and goodness---these consoling tears would no more moisten their eyes.

Who has not seen, sometimes, those veteran soldiers, who are prostrate here and there on the pavement of a sanctuary, erected in the midst of their august retreat? Their hair, which time has whitened---their forehead marked with honourable scars---that tottering step, which age only could impress on them, all inspire at first respect; but by what sentiments are we not affected, when we see them lift up and join with difficulty their weak hands, to invoke the God of the universe, of their heart and mind---when we see them forget, in this interesting devotion, their present pains and past griefs---when we see them rise with a countenance more serene, and expressive of the tranquillity and hope which devotion has infused thro' their souls. Complain not in those moments, you, who judge of the happiness of this world only from its enjoyments. Their looks are humbled; their body trembles; and death awaits their steps. But this inevi-

table end, whose image only terrifies us, they see coming without alarm. They, through religion, have approached him who is good—who can do every thing—whom none ever loved without receiving comfort. Come, and contemplate this sight, you who despise religion—you who term yourselves superior to it. Come, and see the real value of your pretended knowledge in promoting happiness. Change the fate of men, and give them all, if you can, some portion of the enjoyments of life; or respect a sentiment which serves them to repulse the injuries of fortune: and since even the policy of tyrants has never dared to destroy it---since their power would be insufficient to enable them to succeed in the savage attempt---you, to whom nature has given superior endowments, be not more cruel, more inexorable than they. Or if, by a pitiless doctrine, you wish to deprive the old, the sick, and the indigent, of the only idea of happiness which they can apply to, go from prison to prison, and to those dreary cells, where the wretched prisoners struggle with their chains; and shut with your own hands, if you have the heart to do it, the only aperture through which any ray of light can reach them.

It is not, however, a single class of society, which derives an habitual assistance from religion; it is all those who have to complain of the abuse of authority, of public injustice, and the different vicissitudes of their fate; it is the innocent man who is condemned---the virtuous man who is slandered---the man who has once acted inconsistently, and been censured with too much rigour---all those, in short, who, convinced of the purity of their own conscience, seek, above all, for a secret witness of their intentions and an enlightened judge of their conduct.

A man of an exalted character, endowed with sen-

sibility of heart, experiences also the necessity of forming to himself an image of an unknown Being, to which he can unite all the ideas of perfection which fill his imagination. It is to him that he refers those different sentiments, which are useless amidst the corruptions which surround him. It is in God alone, that he can find an inexhaustible subject of astonishment and adoration : and with him alone can he renew and purify his sentiments, when he is wearied with the sight of the vices of the world, and the habitual return of the same passions. In short, at every instant, the happy idea of a God softens and embellishes our path through life : by it we associate ourselves with delight to all the beauties of nature : by it every thing animated enters into communication with us. Yes, the noise of the wind, the murmurs of the water, the peaceable agitation of plants, all serve to support, or melt our souls, provided that our thoughts can rise to an universal cause—provided we can discover every where the works of him whom we love—provided we can distinguish the vestiges of his footsteps and the traces of his intentions—and above all, if we can suppose, that we ourselves contribute to the display of his power, and the splendor of his goodness.

But it is principally over the enjoyments of friendship that piety spreads a new charm. Bounds, limits, cannot agree with a sentiment which is as infinite as thought : it would not subsist, at least would be troubled with continual anxiety. We should not consider without terror the revolution of years, and the rapid course of time, if those benevolent opinions, which enlarge for us the future, did not come to our assistance. Thus, when we find ourselves separated from the objects of our affection, lonely meditations bring them back, to aid the general idea of happi-

ness, which, more or less, distinctly terminates our view : then the tender melancholy, in which one is lost, is changed into pleasing emotions : and you have, above all, need of those precious opinions, you, who, timid in a bustling world, or discouraged by disappointments, find yourself a solitary wanderer on the earth, because you partake not of the passions which agitate the greater part of mankind ! You want a friend, and you only see pecuniary associations. You want a comforter ; and you only see the ambitious, strangers to all those who have not power or a distinguished reputation. A tender confidant is at least necessary ; and the active scenes of society disperse the affections, and diminish every interest. In short, when you have this friend, this confidant, this comforter---when you have acquired him by the most tender union---when you live in a son, a husband, or a cherished wife---what other idea, but that of a God, can come to your relief, when the frightful image of a separation presents itself to your thoughts ? It is, indeed, in such moments, that we embrace with transport all those opinions, which tend to foster the idea of continuity and duration. How gladly, then, we lend an ear to those words of comfort which are so perfectly consonant with the desires and the wants of our soul ! What association of ideas so frightful, as that of the eternal annihilation of life and love ? How can we unite to that soft division of interests and of sentiments, to that charm of our days---how can we unite to so much of existence and happiness, the internal persuasion and habitual image of a death without hope, a destruction without return ? How can we offer only the idea of oblivion to those affectionate minds, who have centred all their self-love, all their ambition, in the object of their esteem and tenderness ; and who, after having

renounced themselves, are, as it were, deposited entirely in the bosom of another, to subsist there by the same breath of life and the same destiny? In short, near the tomb, which, perhaps, they will one day bedew with their tears, how can they pronounce the overwhelming words, " forever !---forever !"--- Oh ! horrors of horrors, both for the mind and feelings ! and if it be necessary, that the contemplations of a man of feeling approach for a moment to the frightful confines, let a benevolent cloud at least cover the dark abyss ! Tears and sorrow still afford some comfort, when we give them to a beloved shade---when we can mix with our griefs the name of a God---and when this name appears to you the cement of all nature. But if in the universe all were deaf to our voice---if no echoes were to repeat our complaints---if the shades of eternal darkness had hid from us the object of our love---and if they were advancing to drag us into the same night---if he be the most unhappy being, who survives, and cannot even hope, that what death has severed will again be united---if, when his whole soul was filled with the recollection of a loved object, he could not say :
" He is in some place ; his heart so affectionate, his
" soul so pure and heavenly waits for me, and calls
" me, perhaps, to be near that unknown Being,
" whom we have, with common consent, adored ;"
and if, instead of a thought so dear, it were necessary, without any doubt, to consider the earth as a sepulchre for ever shut---my heart dies within me. Unable to contend with the dreadful images, the universe itself seems to dissolve, and overwhelm us in its downfall. O source of so many hopes, sublime idea of a God ! abandon not the man who has sensibility. Thou art his courage---thou art his futurity---thou art his life ; leave him not desolate ; and

above all, defend him from the ascendancy of a barren and fatal philosophy, which would afflict his heart by pretending to comfort it.

Well, I make another effort ; and I address myself to you, who boast of being enlightened by a fresh ray of wisdom. I am lost in the most profound grief. A father, a mother, who guided me by their counsels, and watched over me by their tenderness---these protecting parents have just been taken from me : a son, a daughter, both my comfort and pride, have been cut off in the prime of youth : a faithful companion, whose words, sentiments, and actions, were the support of my life, has vanished from my arms. A moment of strength remains with me. I come to you, ye philosophers ; what have you to say ? ---“ Seek for dissipation. Turn your thoughts
“ to some other object. An abyss not to be fathom-
“ ed separates thee forever from the objects of thy
“ tenderness: and these recollections, which pierce
“ thee through, with so many sorrows, are on-
“ ly a form of vegetation, the last play of organi-
“ zed matter.” Alas ! have you ever loved, and can you pronounce, tranquilly, these cruel words ! Banish far from me such consolations. I dread them more than my anguish. And thou, O daughter of heaven, lovely and mild Religion, what wouldst thou say ?
“ Hope, hope ; what God gave thee---he can again
“ restore.” What a difference between these two replies ! One abases, the other exalts us ! It is left to men to choose, among their different guides, or rather to determine, whether they prefer darkness to light, death to life---whether they prefer blighting winds to refreshing dews---the frosts of winter, to the charms of spring---and the insensible stone, to the most brilliant gifts of animated nature.

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I will say it : the world, without the idea of a God, would be only a desert, embellished by a few delusions. Yet man, disenchanting by the light of reason, would find nothing, throughout, but subjects of sadness. I have seen them, the dreams of ambition, the allurements of fame, and the vain shows of grandeur : and even when the illusion was most dazzling, my heart always retired into itself, and was attracted to an idea more grand, to a consolation more substantial. I have experienced, that the idea of the existence of a Supreme Being threw a charm over every circumstance of life. I have found, that this sentiment alone was able to inspire men with true dignity : for every thing, which is merely personal, is of little value---all that places some an inch high above others. It is necessary, in order to have any reason to glory, that, at the same time we exalt ourselves, we elevate human nature. We must refer it to that sublime intelligence, which seems to have dignified it with some of its attributes. We then hardly perceive those trivial distinctions, which are attached to transitory things, on which vanity exercises her sway. It is then that we leave to this queen of the world her rattle and toys, and that we search elsewhere another portion. It is then, also, that virtue, exalted sentiments, and grand views, appear the only glory of which man ought to be jealous.

SIXTH CHAPTER.

The same subject continued. The influence of virtue on happiness.

IT is not sufficient to have demonstrated, that religion, so necessary to feeling minds, agrees perfectly with the moral nature of men. It is still necessary to observe, that the habitual exercise of vir-

true, enjoined as a duty in the name of God, is not in opposition with happiness: and after having considered a truth so important, I will prove, that it is not contrary to what has been said in the first chapter of this work, on the impossibility of making men attentive to public order, merely by the motive of personal interest.

We cannot deny, that virtue often obliges us to conquer our appetites and struggle with our passions. But if these conflicts, and the victory which attends them, lead to more solid and durable satisfactions, than those of which folly and vice portray the image, they would misconceive the restrictions of morality, who perpetually united the idea of self-denial with that of a sacrifice.

We cannot fix our attention on the various objects of desire which occupy the thoughts of men, without seeing clearly, that if they abandoned themselves, unrestrained, to all their wild propensities, they would often stray far from the state of happiness which forms the object of their wishes. Any of the blessings strewed here and there in our path cannot fill the void of life. Are they the gratifications of the senses which captivate us? Their duration is determined by our weakness: and we cannot break loose from the immutable limits opposed by nature. Are they the advantages dependent on opinion, that we look for, such as honour and praise; or the exterior splendor, which fortune gives? You will soon perceive, that quickly after they are obtained, the charm is flown. They resemble Proteus in the fable, who only appeared a God at a distance. Men then have more need than is supposed, of an interest independent of their senses and imagination: and this interest we find in the duties morality inculcates and establishes.

In all times, in all circumstances, we have a choice between good and evil : thus, virtue may be continually in a state of action ; and we may find the application of it even in the most apparently indifferent relations of life ; because virtue only has the privilege of connecting little things to a great object ; and because it can only be encouraged by conscience, which, in accompanying all our actions and meditations, seems to augment our existence, and procure those satisfactions which are not known to the crowd, who do not act from principle.

Sensual pleasures, the desires of vanity, the longings of ambition, would soon extinguish themselves, were they not fed by the continual activity of society, which produces new scenes, and displays every moment some changes of decoration. Virtue, satisfied with its views, has not need of a succession of similar desires. Its paths are varied ; but the end is ever the same.

We cannot search for the enjoyments of life in the imaginary advantages of opinion, without allowing others to construct the laws on which our happiness is founded : and of course discord must result, which leaves us a prey to every kind of emotion. | Virtue has not any associates in her counsels ; she judges herself of all that is good. And in this respect, a virtuous man is the most independent of all beings ; for it is from himself alone, that he receives commands, and expects approbation. Yes, the obscure man, who does good in secret, is more master of his destiny, than the being ever will be, who seems loaded with all the favours of fortune, and has need, that fashion and transient gratifications come to determine his taste, and give laws to his vanity, to enable him to enjoy them./

The little passions of the world, trying to render

us happy, lead us on from one illusion to another ; and the last boundary always appears at a distance. Virtue, very different, has its recompenses within itself. It is not in events nor in uncertain success, that it places contentment. It is even in our resolution, in the calmness which accompanies it, and the secret sentiment which precedes it.

Recollection ever composes the principal happiness of virtue ; while worldly vanity is tormented by the remembrance of what is gone forever : and with regard to the passions in general, the past is but a gloomy shadow, out of which proceed, from time to time, sorrow and remorse.

The intervals which occur between the starts of violent passions, are almost always filled by sadness and apathy. We all know, according to the laws of nature, that lively and ardent sensations produce languor the moment the tumult is over. Virtue, in the enjoyment of those pleasures peculiar to itself, knows nothing of those irregular emotions ; because all its principles are firm, and it acts round its own centre : besides, it also invites us continually to set a just value on that happiness which is most proper for us. It dictates its first laws in the bosom of domestic life, and employs all its strength to sustain, by the ties of duty, our most rational and simple affections.

Virtue, which is the offspring of religion, is of the greatest use in delivering men from the tormenting solicitude of doubt, by presenting a general system of conduct ; and above all, by marking fixed points to direct them, by telling them what to love, choose, and do. Thus, while men, carried away by their imagination, continually allow that they are deceived by phantoms, and lend the most glowing colours to those which have just escaped them, virtue sets no value but on what it possesses, and knows not re-

gret. It would seem, at the first glance, that the desires and caprices of the imagination cannot agree with any kind of restraint. However, it is not less true, that these trifling forerunners of our will have need of a guide, and often of a master. Our first inclinations and sentiments are frequently uncertain, weak and wavering: it is of consequence to our happiness, that this trembling stalk should be fixed and supported: and such is the service virtue renders to the human mind.

We see not any uniformity in the conduct of those who are not influenced by motives of duty. They have too many things to regulate, too many to decide about every instant, when convenience is their only guide. To simplify the management of ourselves, we should submit to the government of a principle, which may be easily applied to most of our deliberations.

In short, virtue has this great advantage, that it finds its happiness in a kind of respect for the rights and claims of the different members of the community, and that all its sentiments seem to unite themselves to the general harmony. The passions, on the contrary, are almost always hostile. The vain man desires that others should grace his triumphs; the proud wishes them to feel their inferiority; the ambitious, that they keep clear of his pursuit; the imperious, that they bend to him. It is the same of the different competitions, which an excessive love of praise, high reputation, or fortune, gives birth to. In the path they choose, every one would wish to go alone, or advance before all the rest: and, occupied about their own interest, they clash inconsiderately with those of others. Virtue, very different in following its course, fears neither rivals nor competitors. It does not jostle with any one: the road is

spacious; and all may walk at their ease. It is an orderly alliance, of which morality is the knot, drawing together by the same motives and hopes held in common, that chain of duties and sentiments which unite the virtues of men to the ideal model of all perfection.

Virtue, which guards us from the snares of our senses, and checks our blind desires, is, besides, the basis of the most precious wisdom. But it is not the interest of a day, or the pleasures of a moment, that it protects: it is the whole of life, that it takes under its superintendency. It is, to speak metaphorically, the vindicator of futurity, the representative of duration, and becomes, to the feelings, what foresight is to the mind. We must then, with respect to private manners, consider virtue as a prudent friend, taught by the experience of all ages, who directs our steps, and never lets the flambeau waver, whose salutary light ought to guide them. Our tumultuous passions dispute the honour of partaking the government. It is necessary a master should assign to each its proper limits—one who can keep in peace all these petty domestic tyrants; which reminds us of the image of Ulysses, arriving suddenly in the midst of the hundred kings who had taken possession of his palace.

Virtue, some will say, severe in its judgments, and austere in its forms, would it not deprive us of the greatest happiness, the pleasure of being beloved? I reply, that virtue in its most improved state, has not this character. I represent it to myself as a just sentiment of order; far from banishing all other comforts, it leads to them. Thus, benevolence and forbearance, which agree so well with human weakness—the social spirit, so consistent with our nature—urbanity in discourse and manner—that ami-

able expression of a heart, which seeks to unite itself with others—all these qualities, very far from being strangers to virtue, are its attendants and brightest ornaments.

Virtue allies itself to all the ideas which can give extent to our mind, and early in life accustoms us to discern relations, and to sacrifice frequently our present affections to distant considerations. It is, of all our sentiments, that which carries us farthest out of ourselves, and consequently has the nearest resemblance with abstract thinking. It is then, through the assistance of virtue, that a man acquires all his knowledge of his strength and all his grandeur. Vice, on the contrary, concentrates us in a little space. It seems to be conscious of its own deformity, and fears all that surrounds it. It endeavours to fix on a single object, on a single moment, and would wish to have power to draw into a point our whole existence.

It must still add, that virtue, by uniting a motive to all our actions, and by directing towards an end all our sentiments, habituates our mind to order, and justness of conception; and prevents our wandering in too great a space. Thus I have often thought, that it was not only by his vices, that an immoral man is dangerous in the administration of public affairs. We ought to fear him also as unable to comprehend a whole, and for his want of capacity to rally all his thoughts and direct them towards any general principle. Every kind of harmony is unknown to him, every rule is become a burden; he is busy but only by starts; and it is by accident that a man always versatile, stumbles on what is right.

It may then truly be said, that morality serves as ballast to our sentiments: its aid enables us to go on without being agitated continually by the ca-

prices of our imagination, without being obliged to turn back at the first appearance of an obstacle.

Virtue then enlarges the mind, gives dignity to the character, and invests it with every thing becoming. Of all the qualities of men, the most rare, the most apt to create respect, is, that elevation of thought, sentiment, and manners; that majestic consistency of character which truth alone can preserve, but which the least exaggeration, the most trivial affectation, would disconcert or banish. This resembles not pride, and still less vanity; as one of its ornaments is, that it never seeks for the homage of others. The man endowed with real dignity, is placed above even his judges. He accounts not with them: he lives under the government of his conscience: and proud of such a nobler ruler, he does not wish for any other dependence. But as this grandeur is entirely within himself, it ceases to exist, when he dictates to others what he expects from them. It can only be restrained in its just limits by virtues, which do not pretend to dazzle.

It is to the same principle, that men owe that noble respect for virtue, the most graceful ornament of a great soul. They owe to it also that simplicity in thinking and speaking, that happy habit of a conscience not in want of being on its guard. A man truly honest considers disguise as a detractor, and desires to appear as he really is. It is not his interests to conceal his weaknesses; for in a generous heart they are almost always united to something good: and perhaps frankness would have become the policy of his mind, if it had not been one of the qualities of his character.

There is, in every virtue, a kind of beauty which charms us without reflexion: our moral sense when it is improved by education, is pleased with that social

harmony which the sentiments of justice preserve. These enjoyments are unknown to men, whose selfishness renders them insensible to every kind of concord : and they appear to me to deserve our contempt in one essential point. It is, that they profit by the respect others have for order, without being willing to subject themselves to the same rules, and without declaring publicly their intention. It seems to me, that in this view, a defect of morality is indeed a breach of the laws of hospitality.

In short, talents, those faculties of the mind which belong more immediately to nature, can never be applied to great things without the aid of morality : there is no other way of uniting the interest of men, and of attaining their love and respect. Honesty resembles the ancient idioms, according to which you must know how to speak, when you wish to be understood by the generality : and a language is never well known, but by constant practice. The understanding is sometimes sufficient to acquire an ascendancy in circumscribed relations. You there take men one by one ; and you often engage them by proportioning yourself to their depth. But on a vast theatre, and principally in public administration, where we have need of captivating men in a body, it is necessary to search for a band which will embrace all ; and it is only by a union of talents and virtue, that this chain can be formed. And when I see the homage paid by a nation to virtuous characters—when I remark the almost instinctive judgment which assists in discerning them—when I see that they praise and love only what they can connect to pure virtue, and noble intention, I return to my favourite sentiment, and believe I recognize in these emotions the stamp of a hand divine.

After having tried to give a feeble sketch of the

various recompenses and different satisfactions which seem to appertain to regularity of principles, and propriety of conduct, you will perhaps ask, if you have not a right to conclude from these reflexions, that we can attach men to morality by the mere motive of personal interest? I have already mentioned, that I intended to answer such an objection; and now is the time to do it.

Virtue, in its most improved state—virtue, such as we have just represented—is not the work of a moment: it is necessary, that it should be called forth and strengthened by degrees. But it would be nipped when it first begins to unfold itself, if we destroyed the simple opinions which serve to educate it—if we overturned the only end which can be perceived by all minds—and if we weakened the sentiments which connect it with those who respect the laws of morality, and who promote this cultivation by their commendations and esteem.

Besides, it is not virtue only, but virtue united to different motives, which contributes to our happiness. This observation is very important: and with great facility you may be made to feel the full force of it. Employment is generally reckoned the surest source of agreeable impressions, of which we are susceptible: but its charm would vanish, if it did not lead to some recompense—if it did not show, in perspective, an increase of wealth, an enjoyment for our self-love, a chance for fame, or some other advantages, of which we are desirous. Vainly, say some, that the exercise of our faculties is of itself a pleasure; certainly, because that it offers to our view a train of prospects which succeed each other. But there must always be a strong motive to direct us to the right road, and make us set off: our bark must be driven by the wind: in short, every kind of labour requires

encouragement, although this labour, proportioned to our strength, may be more favourable to happiness than sloth and idleness: and this truth would strike us still more, if we had ability to analyze a sentiment with sufficient attention, to distinguish clearly the happiness which is annexed to action and employment, from that which necessarily relates to the end and to the motive of that action.

The reflexions, which I have just made, may be applied to virtue. We can easily, in studying its different effects, perceive, that it is an excellent guide in the course of life: but we discover, at the same time, that it has need, as well as employment, of a spur, a simple encouragement on a par with our understanding: it is in religion that virtue finds this encouragement: and we shall not be able to separate it from the motives and hopes it presents, without disconcerting every connexion it has with human happiness.

It will be easy to perceive the great benefit which must arise from morality: but at the same time it must be remarked, that, to follow its dictates with confidence and firmness, knowledge and strong powers of reflexion are necessarily required in the study of so compounded a truth. We are then in want of a motive to excite our first effort, which subjects us to self-denial, and determines us to struggle with courage against the dominion of the present moment.

In short, even when, by the art of sophistry, some philosophers have, at length, thrown into confusion the true principles of order and happiness—when, by the force of address, they have led us to doubt about the kind and degree of power which it is necessary to assign to religion—it should not, however, be the legislators of the nation who would lend an ear to their subtle distinctions.

Metaphysical sentiments and ideas are not proper for statesmen, but in their own defence—to assist them to guard themselves from the ascendancy of brilliant errors, and to confirm the respect due to useful truths: but when they have to guide minds, when they wish to excite activity, it is always, if they be wise, the most simple idea that they will make use of: and they will be very careful not to despise those habitual principles, to which time, still more than knowledge, has given a sanction. These are so many lessons, which long experience seems to have gradually disengaged from every thing foreign to natural morality and the secret sentiments of men.

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

On religious opinions, in their relation with sovereigns.

MANY nations, either by choice, or necessity, have deposited their wills in the hands of an individual; and have thus erected a perpetual monument to the spirit of discord and injustice, which has so frequently reigned amongst men. It is true, that from time to time, they have wished to recollect that they were themselves capable of knowing their true interest: but monarchs mistrusting their inconstancy, have taken care to fortify the springs of authority, by surrounding themselves with standing armies: and they have only left them the power of being disgusted with slavery. Soldiers and taxes have supported each other: and through the assistance of this corresponding action, they have become masters and directors of every thing. How much good and evil depend on them? We then necessarily wish them to possess a vigorous morality, proportioned to their immense duties. But what force will your mo-

rality have, if they perceive at last, that it is not supported by a divine sanction—if they consider it as a human institution, which they have power to break, and which they are in the habit of modifying? At least they will have the liberty, like other men, to examine, if their private interest agree with that of the public; and their conduct will depend on the result of this calculation.

I will acknowledge, that at the point of elevation, where kings find themselves placed, they ought not to be acquainted with those passions which proceed from our petty competitions; but how many other sentiments have they not to repress? And with what celerity is it necessary to do it; since they do not experience any contradiction, they are not, like us, obliged to reflect and consider! Besides, though sovereigns are supposed to be sheltered by their situation, from the irritations of self-love, and from the desires of fortune and advancement; they are not, however, disengaged from every passion of this kind. It is towards other princes that they feel them: and envy, ambition, and revenge, become often very dangerous; as they associate with these passions those of the nation they govern, by means of a war. It is then that, freed from religious ties, and sure of not accounting with any body, they would find morality a very ingenious invention, to render the maintenance of public order more easy, and to preserve the subordination which secures their power; but would not acknowledge such a master for themselves, and would dispense with bowing to its dictates.

You will say, undoubtedly, that a virtuous king would be recompensed by the applause of his subjects: but I have already shown, that the influence of public opinion would be very weak, if the principles of morality, which serve to guide this opinion, were not supported by religion. We should also observe,

that eulogiums and applause, homage so encouraging to private men, have not an equal power over princes, who cannot, like individuals, consider this suffrage as an earnest, or forerunner of exaltation. It is by the continual view of the advantages and triumphs of others; that the desire of respect and distinction is continually kept alive : and it may, perhaps, proceed a little from the stimulation of envy, or at least from those jarring pretensions, and from those struggles of self-love, of which society alone is the theatre. Princes without rivals are not subject to the same impressions : and the flattery they have so early imbibed, and the praises which are lavished on them from the simple motive of hope, all serve to render them less sensible to deserved applause. In short, this exaggerated praise soon becomes a dull monotony, which extinguishes, by its uniformity, that emulation which a just homage sometimes inspires. There would be then great danger in reposing too much on the power of public opinion, if we were to consider it as a check able to supply with princes the compressing force of religion.

I must now make an essential remark : those who surround a monarch, often mislead his judgment by the nature and the application of the eulogiums which they lavish on him. The praise of men, in a monarchy, always has a taint of slavery. Thus, in such countries, a look, a word from the prince, which seems to efface, for an instant, the distance that separates him from his subjects, delights them : and their enthusiasm in those moments serves to persuade the monarch, that it is sufficient for him to smile, to render his people happy : dangerous illusion, sad effect of servility ! In short, in consequence of the character which is impressed by an habitual yoke, men are pleased with exalting the power of him to

whom they are obliged to submit; they love to see their servile companions multiplied: and as the greater part of them have seldom any access to the prince, vanity persuades them, that in affecting to partake of the royal grandeur, they contract a kind of familiarity with it. Therefore, without reflecting whether it will be more in the power of the sovereign to make them happy, when, by enlarging his dominions, he shall have more subjects, and of course more duties to fulfil, they celebrate, above all, the conquering warrior, and thus invite princes to prefer the pursuit of military glory to every other. And, as the multitude can quickly comprehend this kind of merit—as the gaining of a battle is a simple idea, easily conceived by men of every condition and turn of mind, it happens, by this reasoning, that these triumphs are the most highly extolled; and even that men on account of them, can excuse every other failure, broken treaties, violated oaths, alliances abandoned. In short, such is the mad folly of our praise, that the tranquillity of the state, the repose of the people, the mild benefits of peace, appear no more than the last consequence of the labours and the success of a monarch; and even history frequently represents this fortunate time, as the days of obscurity in which heroes of blood and carnage are educated. Kings, discontented with their destiny, are warriors through ambition, and happy by the victories, to which we annex our first honours, and the most noble wreaths of fame.

It is thus, however, that the prevailing opinion, and the rumour of renown, can sometimes deceive princes, though inconsistent with the instructions of morality and the legislation of yore, which point out the true interest of the people as the first object of a sovereign's anxious solicitude; and instead of a

sound name, and dazzling qualities, enforce those requisite to form the guardian and protector of the felicity of the public; duties of vast extent, and which are discharged by the secret labours of paternal vigilance, still more than by the noise of the drum, and the instruments of destruction.

Let us consider, however, the influence the opinion of the world will have on sovereigns, in directing only our views towards the interior functions of administration. An essential observation presents itself at first to the mind: it is, that the thirst for glory is especially felt when a great abuse is to be reformed, and when we can hope to make regularity succeed to confusion. But when this task is fulfilled, and that it is only necessary to preserve and support what is good, the love of renown has not sufficient aliment, and it is then that the virtue of princes becomes the only faithful guardian of the public interest. A reign, such as we have formed an idea of, would carry away from the following ones every subject of dazzling splendor: and it would be necessary that new troubles and fears re-activated the sentiment of admiration, to give it its ancient ascendancy and original force.

We should be able also, and this picture would be very different, to figure to ourselves a period, when, by the successive degradation of character, the opinion of the public would no longer indicate the way to fame, nor resound to excite ambition; the recompenses it offers, would not be a motive sufficiently powerful to influence men. Thus, in a country, in a metropolis, where covetousness seemed triumphant, where every body would appear to pursue that fortune which is only acquired by intrigue, and the vices of those who bestow it, respect for the real interest of the people, and attention to lighten their burdens,

would no longer purchase renown. In like manner, in a country where despotism reigns, and the people are accustomed to prostrate themselves before power, they would acknowledge no other idol. We should not there be able to acquire a cotemporary fame by elevation of character, by tempering with wisdom the exercise of authority, and allowing the citizens to enjoy that degree of freedom, which does not degenerate into licentiousness. It is then morality, and morality alone, which comes at all times, and in all circumstances, to resist the revolutions of habit and opinion, of which history furnishes examples, and of which men are ever susceptible:

I ought not to neglect another very important consideration. Princes, by the elevation of their rank, and influence on the national manners, find, that they are in that singular situation, where one is more called to direct the reigning opinion, than receive instruction and encouragement from it. Thus we are impelled to wish, that a monarch should have principles, which flow from his heart, and which depend on his reflexions, from which he may be able to derive, at all times, a force properly his own, a natural courage. It is necessary for a prince to investigate and decide on his own conduct: and a sublime morality should nourish in his heart an ideal model of perfection, with which he can continually compare the opinions of the world and the private judgment of his conscience.

In short, and this last reflexion, which I have made, will apply in a general manner, to the preceding remarks; the opinion of the public, the just complaints of the people, are sometimes a long while in reaching the prince. They ring in the kingdom, before he hears the rumour. They wander round the palace, but the whispers do not reach him. Vanity, pride, and every vice excludes them. The old courtiers sneer;

and the insignificant pursuers of credit or favour amuse themselves by indulging their propensity for ridicule. The ministers who are followed by the clamour, are often importuned by it; and when it reaches their master, find some method to weaken its impression, attributing these commotions to private passions, and giving the name of cabal, to a just indignation against vice. Yes, such is the unhappy fate of princes, that the peace of a state is often tottering, before the opinion of the world reaches them, and discovers the truth; a new consideration, very proper to convince us, that the power of opinion can never equal in utility those grand principles of morality, which, by the aid of religion, are fixed in the hearts of men, to give them laws, without distinction of birth, rank, or dignity.

But if, from sovereigns, we carry our views to those who share their confidence, we shall perceive still more the absolute necessity of an active and governing morality. Ministers without virtue, are more to be feared than sovereigns indifferent to public good. Newly come out of the crowd, they know better than the monarch, the selfish use that they can make of all the passions and vices: and as they are connected with society, as they have a continual relation with the different orders of the state, their corruptions are propagated—and their dangerous influence spreads to a great distance. Attacked, nevertheless, by the public, they become still more mischievous in their means of warding off danger; for despairing of disguise before the attentive eyes of a whole people, they turn their address against the prince. They study, they pry into his weaknesses, and artfully encourage those which may protect or cover the defects of their character. They apply themselves, at the same time, to adorn immorality

with every grace which can render it amiable ; and they endeavour to make virtue hateful, by delineating it as austere, imperious, unsociable, and almost incompatible with our morals and manners. It is thus that ministers, not restrained by principles, occasion not only the misery of a country while their influence lasts, but poison the source of public felicity, by weakening in the monarch his sentiments of duty, diverting his good dispositions, and discouraging, if I may say so, his natural virtues.

In short, the picture which I have just drawn will produce another important observation : the prince, after having wandered out of the path of true glory, may return, when he pleases, to the love of virtue and greatness. All the avenues are open to him, all hearts ready to welcome him ; we have an inclination to love, and desire to esteem him, whom fate has placed at the head of the nation ; and who, invested with the majesty which he borrows from a long train of ancestors, exhibits himself surrounded by all the enchantments of a diadem. We adopt, with pleasure, any interpretation which can excuse his conduct. We impute to ill counsels the faults which he has committed ; and we are eager to enter with him into a new contract of esteem and hope. It is not the same with ministers ; a like indulgence is not due to them ; because they cannot throw the blame on others, and all their actions proceed from themselves. When they have once lost the opinion of the public, their depravity will increase daily ; because, to maintain their post, they are obliged to redouble their intrigues and dissimulation.

I have maturely reflected : the religion of princes, of ministers, of government in general, is the first source of the happiness of the people. We despise it ; because it is not our invention, and we often give

the preference to those artifices of the mind, which seduce us as being our own work : and perhaps they are wanted, after having lost sight of this sure and faithful guide, this companion of true genius, which, like it, prefers easy and simple means. Yes, this exalted virtue, resembling superior abilities, rejects equally those weak resources and inventions, which derive not their origin from an elevated sentiment or grand thought: and, while one obliges a statesman to respect honour, justice, and truth, the other discovers the union of these principles with the just means which strengthen authority, and with the true glory and durable success of politics. In short, while one renders him anxious about the happiness of the people, the other shows how, from the bosom of this happiness, they would see rise insensibly an agreement of interests and of wills, of whose extensive use we are still ignorant.

If we wish to dwell a moment on the private happiness of princes, we shall readily perceive, that they have a real want of the encouragement religion affords. Their distinguished authority appears, indeed, to their mind, a singular privilege. They believe this power should extend to every thing: and they indiscreetly endeavour to accelerate the moments of enjoyment. But as they cannot change the law of nature, it happens, that in delivering themselves up to every thing which seduces their imagination, they experience as quickly the sad languor of indifference, and the oppression of apathy.

Kings, in the exercise of their intellectual faculties, are exposed to the same extremes. Providence having placed them on the pinnacle of fortune, they consequently have not been led from one view to another, and know not those gradations, which actuate their subjects in the name of vanity, self-love,

or fortune.—Alas ! we obey so quickly, and their desires are so soon gratified, that their taste and inclinations cannot be renewed with the rapidity necessary to enable them to fill the irksome void which so frequently occurs. If the magnificent end, which religion offers, were to be obscured, and if, henceforth, we were to consider it as a fallacious illusion, unworthy of our attention, kings would soon attain to that term when the future would appear to their mind a barren uniformity, a space without colour or form.

The numerous duties of princes, undoubtedly, afford a continual source of satisfaction : but it is necessary that they should be able to connect all their obligations to a grand idea, the only one which can constantly animate their actions and thoughts, who have need of neither favour nor advancement from their fellow creatures. And how much would it contribute to their happiness sometimes, to imagine themselves between this world, in which they are weary of their own power, and that magnificent future, the sublime contemplation of which would carry them, with a new charm, to the exercise of their authority ! What pleasure then would flow from this authority, the source of so much good !—What pleasure would they not find in more closely imitating the divine beneficence, the most comfortable of all ideas, and what a moment for them, when, particularly conscious of the presence of the exalted friend of the whole human race, they should be able to reflect, in the morning, on the people they were going to make happy, and in the evening, on those on whom they had actually conferred benefits. What a difference between these delicious moments, whose influence the nation feels, and those insignificant levees, only known to courtiers, in which the mo-

narch is the spectacle, and tastes the sad pleasure of seeing so many men cringing before their own image. What a difference, even between these rapturous sensations, and those raised by flattery, or the dazzling parade which surrounds him, in the midst of which he cannot discern himself, whether he is a great man, or only a king.

In short, we ought to acknowledge, that the more extensive the horizon, which opens before sovereigns, the greater is the number of duties presented to their reflexions, the more they must feel the want of that sustaining power so infinitely superior to their own strength. They are conscious of the disproportion which exists between the extent of their authority and the means entrusted to human nature : and it is only by supporting themselves against that mysterious pillar, erected by religion, that they can be firm, and consider without affright, that providence has called them to regulate and direct the destiny of a whole empire. It was when profoundly meditating on the existence of a God, reflecting on the influence and various relations of such a grand thought, that Marcus Aurelius discovered all the extent of his duties, and felt, at the same time, the courage and the will to fulfil them. The happy and constant agreement of his actions and principles made his reign an illustrious example of wisdom and morality.

We must confess, that it is to virtue, supported by every sentiment which it imprints on the human heart, that we should wish to confide the sacred deposit of public happiness. This alone is always faithful and vigilant ; surpasses the spur of praise ; and, by the ascendancy of a great example, leads men to the knowledge of every thing they ought to admire.

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EIGHTH CHAPTER.

An objection drawn from the wars and from the commotions which religion has given rise to.

I SHALL present, at first, this objection in all its force ; or rather I will not seek to weaken it. It would be needless to recal to the memory of men all the evils that have happened during a long series of years, with which we have reason to reproach the blind and savage zeal of religious fanaticism. Every one has present to his mind those multiplied acts of intolerance which have sullied the annals of history. Every one knows the scenes of discord, of war and fury, which theological controversies have caused amongst men. They have been informed of the fatal consequences which these enterprizes have brought in their train, and which the rare virtues of a great king have not been able to justify. In short, to maintain, in all ages, a remembrance of the fatal abuses which have been committed in the name of the God of peace, it would be sufficient to describe those direful days, when some different tenet produced a sentence of proscription, and the frightful signal of the most cruel frenzies.

It is thus, then, that in all times, by an absurd tyranny, or by a ferocious enthusiasm, triumphs have been contrived for the eager detractors of religion. Let us examine, however, if the deductions which they wish to draw from these errors of the human mind, be founded on reason and justice.

I shall not stop to observe, that religion has often been the pretext, than the true motive, of the unhappy convulsions of which it appears at present the sole origin ; or stop to recal the various political advantages, which could only arise from such a grand

principle of action. Those august testimonies are commemorated in history. I shall only borrow the support of reason, and shall bound my discussion to a few simple reflexions.

Do you think, that by relating the different abuses of authority, we could prove the advantage of anarchy? Could we decry every species of jurisprudence, by recounting all the ills which have been produced by chicane? Should we be able to throw an odium on the sciences, by recalling all the fatal discoveries which are owing to our researches? Would it be proper to stifle every kind of self-love and activity, by reciting the different crimes which covetousness, pride, and ambition have given rise to? And ought we, then, to desire to annihilate religion, because fanaticism has made an instrument of it to distress the human species? All these questions are similar, and all should be resolved in the same manner. Thus we may say, with respect to them, that in all our interests and passions, it is by acquired knowledge and the light of reason, that right is separated from wrong: but we ought never to confound their proximity with a real identity.

Fanaticism and religion have not any connexion; though very often these ideas are found united. It is not the worship of the common Father of men—it is not the morality of the gospel, whose precepts lead to goodness and forbearance, which inspires the spirit of persecution. We should attribute it to a blind madness, uniting all those wild errors and crimes which dishonour humanity. But since, at present, the excesses, to which men abandon themselves, do not induce us to condemn, as a misfortune, all the sentiments of which the criminal passions are only the extreme, why do we wish to refuse religion the gratitude which is its due, because sometimes it has

given birth to hatred and unhappy divisions? It would be necessary rather to remark, that intolerant zeal is, of all the errors of the human mind, that on which the progress of our knowledge appears to have had most influence. In fact, while fanaticism, gradually weakened, seems to be now verging to its decline, the disorders, connected with the common passions of ambition, love of wealth, the thirst of pleasure, remain in all their force. However, what sentiment, what predominant idea, has a greater claim to pardon for its mistakes, than devotion? By what an infinite number of benefits the pure spirit of religion makes amends for the abuses which spring from the false interpretation of its precepts! It is to this spirit, as we have shown, that men owe the stability of public order and the firm principles of justice. It procures the indigent the succours of charity—and virtue its encouragement—oppressed innocence its only refuge—and sensibility its dearest hopes. Yes, the pure spirit of religion surrounds us on every side. It makes the charm of solitude, the band of society, the invigorator of intimate affections: and can we calumniate and wish to destroy it, on recollecting the tyrannic opinions of some priests and sovereigns, whose principles and conduct we now detest?

I shall further remark, and ask, why men denounce a sentence of reprobation against religion, and give, as the motive, the ancient wars of which it has been the origin; while they never contest the importance of commerce, though rivers of blood have been continually shed for the smallest advantage on this account? Can they be so mistaken in their judgment, as to compare a few pecuniary advantages, which one political state never enjoys, but at the expense of another, with those, as precious as they are universal, of which religion is the origin and support?

In short, among the various arguments that are employed to attack these opinions, the most frivolous, undoubtedly, is that, which derives all its force from the errors and faults, of which the present times do not furnish any example. What should we say, if, at the moment when a superb edifice was firm on its foundation, we should be exhorted to level it with the ground, by a relation of all the accidents its erection occasioned?

Throwing then a painful retrospect on the period of history, when religion was made the pretext of wars and cruelty; let us oppose to the return of those sanguinary scenes, let us oppose to the spirit of intolerance, all the force of wisdom, and the instructions of that religion which they pretend to serve by a blind zeal. But far from freeing us from the respect, that we owe to such salutary opinions, which men have abused, let us take advantage of experience, as a new defence against the wanderings of our imaginations, and the surprises of our passions*.

N I N T H C H A P T E R.

Another objection examined. The sabbath.

I DO not intend to place among the objections I ought to discuss, nor in the number of arguments, that it is important to examine, the various opinions on such and such parts of religious worship, nor the difficulties raised against the adoption of some dog-

N O T E.

* I should have enlarged this chapter, if I did not intend to make some general reflexions on intolerance in another part of this work.

matic notion, thought essential by some, and considered with indifference by others. It is not a treatise of controversial theology which I wish to compose : and it is still less the doctrines of one particular church, which I would oppose to that of another. All of them connect morality to the commands of a Supreme Being. They all of them see in the public worship the respectful expression of a sentiment of love and gratitude towards the Author of Nature. Thus, those who might think they perceived some imperfections in the system, or in the forms of worship, adopted in a nation, should not use this objection to dispute the utility of religion ; since the reflexions, which have been just made on its importance, may be applied equally to the doctrines of all countries, and the principles of every sect.

I shall dwell then on the only difficulty which interests, without distinction, the different religions of Europe.

The establishment of public worship, and the necessity of consecrating at least one day in every week, occasions, say some, a suspension of labour too frequent : and this suspension injures the state, and diminishes the resources of the people.

I may at first observe, that such objections would appear very weak, if compared with the great advantages which men owe to religion ! An increase of wealth can never outweigh order, morality, and happiness. But I must go further to prove, that a day of rest, devoted among us to public worship, cannot injure the political strength ; and that, so far from being contrary to the interests of the people, it protects and favours them : and as I invariably prefer such interests to all others, I shall begin by demonstrating, in a few words, the justness of this proposition.

We should be mistaken, if we thought, that in a given space of time, men, forced, by the inequality of conditions, to live by their labour, would, by observing the precepts of religion, better their situation, if they were not obliged to rest from labour one day in every week.

It is necessary, in order to perceive this truth, to examine, first, what is now the measure of wages. It is not in exact proportion between labour and its reward. In fact, if we consulted only the light of reason and equity, no one, I believe, would dare to decide, that the most scanty necessities are the just price of fatiguing and painful labour, which commences at the dawn, and does not finish till the setting of the sun. We should not be able to maintain, that in the midst of their enjoyments, and in the bosom of luxurious idleness, the rich ought not to grant any other retribution to those who sacrifice their time and strength to increase their revenue and multiply their enjoyments. It is not then by the principles of common sense or reflexion, that the wages of the generality have been fixed. It is a compact established by power, a yoke to which the weak must submit. The possessor of a vast domain would see all his riches vanish, if numerous labourers did not come to cultivate his estate, and carry into his store-house the fruit of their toil. But, as the number of men without property is immense, their concurrence, and the pressing need they have to labour for a subsistence, obliges them to receive the law from him who can, in the bosom of ease, wait quietly for their services : and it results from this habitual relation between the rich and poor, that the wages for hard labour are constantly reduced to the most scanty allowance, that is to say, to what is only sufficient to satisfy their daily and indispensable wants.

This system once settled, if it were possible, that, by a revolution in our nature, men could live and preserve their strength without allotting every day some hours to repose and sleep, it is beyond doubt, that the work of twenty hours would be required for the same wages now granted for twelve.

Or, by an assimilation; agreeing with the hypothesis I have just mentioned, suppose that a moral revolution permitted labourers to work the seventh day; the rich would, consequently, in a short time, require of them the extraordinary labour at the former rate: and this levelling would take place through the gradual diminution of the price of labour. The class of society, which, in exerting its power, has regulated the present wages, not according to reason and equity, but according to the necessities of the labourers, would quickly discern its own interest; and that when a day more was paid for, the people could bear a diminution of the seventh part of their wages, and be in their old state. Thus, though before the change had thoroughly taken place, all those who live by labour would think that they had acquired a new resource; yet they would soon be brought to their former condition; for it is the same with social order as with the law of equilibrium in nature, which combines ranks, and places every thing according to the immutable law of the proportion of force.

Men, devoid of property, after having been some time deceived, would only get an increase of work by the abolition of the Sabbath: and as this truth does not present itself naturally to the mind, we ought to consider, as an essential service of religion, its having secured the greater number of men from a degree of oppression, to which they would have run blindly, if they had been at liberty to make a choice.

The daily labour of one class of society surpasses the reasonable measure of its strength, and hastens the days of decrepitude. It was then absolutely necessary that the customary course of these labours should be, for a time, suspended : but as the people, pressed by wants of every kind, are exposed to be seduced by the slightest appearance of advantage, it was further necessary to their happiness, that the interruption of their fatigues, fixed by a religious duty, appeared not to them the voluntary sacrifice of fortune, and did not leave in them any regret. In short, they are pleased when they think of those days of rest, which produce a little alteration in their manner of living : and they require that alteration, not to be depressed by a continual train and repetition of the same occupations. Thus, were you to assert artfully, that the people are not as comfortable of a Sunday, as during the week, it would be at least true, that one is softened by the expectation of the other. There are people so very wretched, and probably, on that account, so bounded are their desires, that the most trifling variety is a substitute for hope. It seems to me, that the hearts of the common people may be sometimes cheered with the thought of being once a week dressed like their superiors ; when they are absolute masters of their time, and can say,—and I also—I am free*.

NOTE.

* These various reflexions are very necessary in the place where I live ; since, for a short time, labourers have been permitted to work, at Paris, of a Sunday. We see this publicly done at the new bridge, which is building over the Seine ; as if a work of mere convenience was in such haste, that the laws should be dispensed with, to accelerate its execution. The labourers, some will say, are glad to gain a day every week. Undoubtedly, because they see only the present instant, they have reason to think so. But it is

I must now examine the second proposition which I have mentioned.

You have made it obvious, some will say, that an augmentation of the days of labour would occasion a reduction of the wages allowed for it; we may then reasonably ask, if this result would not favour commerce, and contribute in some respect, to increase the political strength? Undoubtedly, you may consider under this point of view, the diminution of the reward of industry: but the political strength being always a relative idea, and derived from comparisons with other states, this strength can never be augmented or diminished by a circumstance common to all the countries of Europe. Were a barbarous ambition to abolish in one state the Sabbath, the abolition would probably procure it a degree of superiority, if it was the only one that adopted such a change: but as soon as others followed the example, the advantage would disappear. However, the same arguments ought to serve to convince us, that those countries, where the intervals of inaction occur oftener, have necessarily a political disadvantage, with regard to others; where Sunday and a few solemn feasts are the only days of rest prescribed by government.

We may conclude from these observations, that so far from finding fault with religion, for appointing a day of rest, devoted every week to public worship,

N O T E.

the duty of government to consider, in a more comprehensive point of view, the interest of the people, of that part of society, which is so blind, or so limited in its calculation. And the church should examine also, if the sudden alteration of a practice so ancient, may not give rise to an idea, that the spirit of religion is grown feeble. For the nations where this spirit is best preserved, have the greatest respect for the Sabbath.

we ought to acknowledge with pleasure, that such an institution is a benevolent act, extended to the most numerous class of the inhabitants of the earth, the most deserving our consideration and protection; from which we require so much, and return so little: towards that unfortunate class, whose youth and maturity the rich profit by, and abandon them when the hour is come, in which they have no more strength left, but to enable them to pray and weep.

T E N T H C H A P T E R.

An observation on a particular circumstance of public worship.

IT is not sufficient, that sovereigns are persuaded of the influence of religion on the morality and happiness of men. They ought to make use of proper means to maintain this salutary action: and, of course, every part of public worship becomes of the greatest importance. Educated in a religion, thought by some to approach nearer the first ideas of christianity, yet as it has adopted several principles by no means consonant with the catholic faith, it would be unwise in me to discuss any of the questions which divide the two churches: and I should do it without any good accruing from it; so much are we disposed to refer to early prejudices, the ideas which are most intimately blended with the sentiments and feeling of a man; we like to take a general view, and this method agrees with our indolence; but it leads us often astray. I think, however, that the minds of the people are now sufficiently enlightened, to permit me to advise the superiors of both church and state, to

examine attentively, if it be not full time to make more use of the vulgar tongue, and if we be not warned, by the present depravity of morals, to alter the manner of performing divine service in this respect.

It is only during an interval of the grand mass, that the priest addresses to country people some words of exhortation in their own language. It was natural to consider this moment as the most proper to dispose the mind to respect and attention : but perhaps, even the pomp of an august ceremony, by attracting strongly the imagination, withdraws the generality from the importance of the other parts of divine worship ; and it frequently happens, in country places, that many people go out of the church during the sermon, and return at the moment of consecration.

I think, also, that public prayers should always be in the vulgar tongue ; and they might easily be made interesting and affecting ; as there are not any religious discourses which sympathize more with human weakness ; and as our wants and anxieties may be made use of to raise us towards the Supreme Being, the best of all bands might be chosen to win the multitude.

I must observe, besides, that part of the country people, especially in harvest time, and other seasons, when the husbandman is particularly busy, assist only at early mass, and then they see but a part of the religious ceremonies*. And, if the practice and liberty of working on a Sunday were more extended, the inhabitants of the country, still more confined to the first mass, would hear neither prayers nor in-

N O T E.

* This mass is commonly called a low mass.

structive discourses in their own language, during the whole year.

Certainly there must be something altered in these religious institutions, in order to make them more efficaciously serve to support morality, and comfort the most numerous class of the human race. Country people, whose labour produces our wealth, ought to be taken care of with paternal anxiety: and since they are not exposed to those disorderly passions which find nourishment in a metropolis—since mild and prudent means still suffice to maintain them in the habit of duty—both the superiors in church and state have to answer, in some measure, for the corruption of their manners and dispositions.

ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

That the single idea of a God is a sufficient support of morality.

AFTER having shown that morality has need of a supernatural support, you have reason to expect, that I should explain the intimate and immediate relation, which unites religion to the love of virtue, and the observance of order. I will endeavour, then, to discuss this important question: and in order to arrive at the truth, I shall follow, first, the course of those simple sentiments, and natural thoughts, which guide the mind and the heart of man, in every climate and country under heaven.

It is easy to unite all the moral legislation, and the entire system of our duties, by means only of the idea of a God.

The universe, notwithstanding its magnificence and its immensity, would be a mere nothing, if its Supreme Author had not peopled it with intelligent beings, capable of contemplating so many wonders, and of receiving happiness from them. But the faculties with which we are endowed, the consciousness of possessing them, and the liberty to act, all announce to us, that we are united to a grand combination, that we have a part to take on the vast stage of the world.

The most simple reason, that which resembles instinct, would have been sufficient to enable us to take care of the body, and to have concentrated us in ourselves: more would not have been necessary for those who have so little to do. Thus, when I see that the mind is susceptible of continual improvement—when I see that men enjoy the power of assisting each other, and of communicating their ideas in a manner so much superior to other animals—when I fix my attention on our social dispositions, and on all the relative qualities which compose our nature—I cannot avoid thinking, that we have a plan of conduct to follow towards others, and that in our pilgrimage on earth we must be circumspect, having obstacles to conquer, sacrifices to make, and obligations to fulfil.

Men then appear to be led to religion by the most excellent gifts of nature, and by all that they have in them of the sublime. But we ought to remark, as a singular resemblance, that their wants also, and their extreme weakness, lead them to the same object.

Whatever may be my emotions when I reflect on the present imperious laws, to which I am obliged to submit—and when I recal to mind the grandeur and magnificence which I have been a witness of—I raise continually my soul towards the Sovereign Director

of events, and am led by instinct, as well as by a rational sentiment, to address my prayers to him. It appears to the unfortunate, when they view so many wonders which their understanding cannot grasp, that so little is wanting to guard them from the dangers which threaten them, they implore the commiseration of him, whose formidable power bursts from all sides. But, while they admire and adore, they must imitate his perfections, and not expect mercy when they show none. Purity of heart only can render an intercourse with the Supreme Being interesting: and prayers are merely a solemn kind of mockery—when they do not produce virtue and forbearance, when they do not render us kindly affected to each other. Our very state of dependence, our wants and weaknesses, should bind us to those beings who equally share the blessings so liberally bestowed, and have the same evils to endure. Thus discontent, the fear of futurity, the anxiety caused by misfortunes, all the sentiments, which engage men to disturb social order, take another character, or are at least sensibly modified; when, from their first suffering, they can elevate their wishes to God, but dare not do it, with a heart sullied by criminal intentions.

It is not only prayer which leads us to religion; another communication with the Supreme Being, gratitude, produces the same effect. A man, persuaded of the existence of a sovereign power, and who gladly connects with the divine protection his success and happiness, feels, at the same time, a desire to express his gratitude: and not being able to do any thing for him who bestows all, he seeks to form an idea of the perfections of that Supreme Being, in order to comprehend the system of conduct most conformable to his attributes. At first, what reflexions

possess our mind, what emotions agitate our souls, when we contemplate the universe—when we respectfully admire that magnificent harmony, which is the incomprehensible result of an innumerable multitude of different powers? Struck with this vast whole, where we discover an agreement so perfect, how is it possible for us to avoid considering order as a distinct mark of the wisdom and of the design of omnipotence? And how is it possible for us not to think that we render him the most worthy homage, at the time we make use of the free intelligence which he has endowed us with? Then in the composition of a social structure, a work which has been entrusted to us, we shall try to penetrate the ideas of wisdom and order, of which all nature presents such a grand example; then, in establishing the relations which unite men, we shall carefully study the laws of moral order, and we shall find them all founded on the reciprocation of duties, which subject to a regular movement different jarring personal interests. In short, the idea of a God, Creator, Regenerator, and Preserver of the Universe, by invariable laws, and by a train of the same causes and the same effects, seems to call us to the conception of an universal morality, which, in imitation of the unknown springs of the natural world, may be as the necessary tie of this succession of intelligent beings, who always, with the same passions, come to pass and repass on the earth, to seek, or to flee from, to assist, or to hurt each other, according to the strength or the weakness of the knot which unites them, and according to the wisdom or inconsistency of the principles which direct their opinions.

The attentive study of man and of his nature ought to contribute to confirm in us the idea which we have just pointed out. We cannot, in fact, con-

sider the prodigious difference which exists between the minds and characters of men—we cannot fix our attention on the length to which this difference may be carried, by the perfectibility of which they are susceptible—we cannot, in short, reflect on a like constitution—without being induced to think, that the counterpoise of these extraordinary means of force and usurpation must proceed from reason, from that singular authority which alone can establish, between men, relations of justice and convenience, proper to maintain an equilibrium and harmony in the midst of so many disparities. It is thus, that respect for morality seems evidently to make a part of the general view and primitive idea of the Supreme Disposer of the universe. And what pleasure shall we not find in the persuasion, that the cultivation of virtue, the observance of order, offers us the means of pleasing our Divine Benefactor ! It is by that alone we can hope to concur, however feebly, in the execution of his grand designs ; and in the centre of so many blessings, surrounded by so many signs of a particular protection, how highly ought we to value this means of communication with the Author of our existence ? Thus, then, the homage of adoration and gratitude, which we render to the Deity, leads us to a sentiment of respect for the laws of morality : and this sentiment, in its turn, serves continually to maintain in us the idea of a Supreme Being.

Independent of the reflexions which we have just presented, morality, considered in all its extent, has need of being strengthened by this disposition of the soul, which makes us interested in the happiness of others : and it is, besides, in one of the most glorious perfections of the Deity, that we find the first model of this precious sentiment. Yes, we cannot deny it : either our existence proceeds from

no cause, or we owe it to the goodness of the Supreme Being. Life, some will say, undoubtedly is a mixture of pains and pleasures : but, if we be candid, we shall confess, that those moments, when it ceases to appear to us a benefit, do not often occur in life. In youth, existence is thought the greatest blessing : and the other seasons of life offer pleasures less animated, certainly, but which agree better with the progress of our understanding, and the increase of our experience.

It is, true, that in order to free ourselves from a sentiment of gratitude, we often think that we would not accept of a renewal of life, on condition of our running over a second time our career, and returning step by step in the same track. But we should consider, that we do not fix a just value on the benefits which we have received ; for when we take a retrospective view of life, we see it stripped of its two principal ornaments, curiosity and hope : and it is not in this state that it was given to us, and that we have enjoyed it.

It is perhaps, not in our power to replace ourselves, by contemplation, in the situation where the imagination made our chief pleasure ; a slight breath has easily effaced it from our memory. It is evident that we enjoy life ; because we look forward with affright to the moment when we shall be forced to renounce it. But, as this happiness is composed of present pleasures, and those which we anticipate, we cease to be good judges of the value of life, when this future prospect is not presented to our eyes, but under the form of the past ; for we know not how to appreciate, with a languishing recollection, that which we have loved in the moment of hope.

Physical evils are not either the end or the condition of our nature ; they are its accidents. The happiness of infancy, which shows in its primitive

purity the works of the Deity, visibly point out the goodness of the Supreme Being : and how can we avoid believing, that we owe our origin to a benevolent design, since it is a desire of happiness, which has been given to serve as the motive of all our actions ? We should, indeed, speak well of life, if we had not corrupted its comforts by artificial sentiments, which we have substituted instead of nature—if we had not submitted so many realities to pride and vanity—if, instead of assisting each other to be happy, we had not employed our thoughts to make others submit to us. Undoubtedly there are some sufferings annexed to our existence ; as in the natural world there are apparent defects. Let us employ our minds on the most exalted subjects ; and we shall no longer be a prey to envy and discontent.

It is on the consideration of detached events---it is in some particular circumstance, that we raise doubts about the goodness of God : but we immediately discern it, when we compare particulars which wound us, with the great whole, of which they make a part ; we discover then, that the misfortunes which we are so quickly offended with, are a simple appendage of a general system, where all the characters of a beneficent intelligence are evidently traced. It is necessary, then, to view the whole of life, in order to discover the intention of the Author of nature ; and in meditating in this manner, we shall return always to a sentiment of respect and gratitude. This simple idea is very extensive in its application : it seems to me, above all, that it serves to console us under the ills of life ; the man, who is penetrated by it, can say to himself : “ The transitory evil, to which I am subject, is perhaps one of the inevitable effects of this universal harmony, the most noble and the most extensive of all conceptions. Thus, in

“ the moments when I bemoan my fate, I ought not
“ to think myself forsaken, I ought not to accuse him,
“ whose infinite wisdom is present to my view, him
“ whose general laws have so often appeared to me
“ a visible expression of real goodness.”

It is in vain, some will say, it is in vain that you would wish to make us attend to these considerations. We only remark, that our earthly happiness is at least inferior to that which our imagination so readily forms the picture of: and we do not perceive, in such a disposition, the union of perfections, which ought to be ascribed to the Supreme Being.

This objection is presented under different forms, in the writings of all the enemies to religion: and they have drawn consequences, sometimes against the goodness of God, his power, his wisdom, and justice. It is necessary, clearly to explain this difficulty, to be in a state to form to ourselves an idea of the perfection of an infinite Being: but in all our attempts, we only carry to the extreme every quality which we conceive: instead of that, perfection in the works of the Creator, probably consists in a kind of gradation and harmony, the secret of which we cannot either embrace, or penetrate: and we ought still more to be on our guard, when we form any conception of the essence of the Deity; as, by confining ourselves solely to reconcile his sovereign power with his perfect goodness, we should never fix the boundary when these two properties will be in an equilibrium: for after having exhausted every supposition, we might still ask, why the number of rational beings is not more extended? We might ask, why every grain of sand is not one of those beings? Why there is not a number equal to that infinite divisibility, of which we form the idea? In short, from extreme to extreme, and always in arguing on the sovereign power,

the least inanimate atom, the least void in nature, would appear a boundary to the goodness of the Supreme Being. We see, then, to what a point we may wander, when we abandon common sense for the vague excursions of a metaphysical spirit.

I think, if no other proofs could be found, the power of God would be sufficient to demonstrate his goodness; for this power informs us, every instant, that if the Supreme Ruler of the world had intended the misery of rational beings, he would have had, to fulfil this intention, means as rapid as numerous. He needed not have created worlds, nor have made them so convenient and beautiful: a terrific gulph, and eternal darkness, might have been sufficient to collect together those unfortunate beings, and make them feel their misery. Let us not dwell on these gloomy subjects: let us follow a just emotion of gratitude. We shall be eager then to render homage to that indelible character of love and goodness which we see stamped on all nature. An unknown power opens our eyes to the light, and permits us to view the wonders of the universe. It awakens in us those enchanting sensations which first point out the charms of life. It enriches us with that intellectual gift which re-assembles round us past ages, and the time to come. It confers, in an early hour, an empire, by endowing us with those two sublime faculties, will and liberty. In short, it renders us sensible to the real pleasure of loving and being beloved: and when, by the effect of a general plan, of which we have but an imperfect conception, it spreads here and there some difficulties in the road of life—it seems to wish to soften them, by showing us always the future through the enchanting medium of the imagination. Could it be then without any interest or goodness, that this magnificent system was conceived, and pre-

served by so many superb demonstrations of wisdom and power? What should we be in the sight of the Eternal, if he did not love us? We do not adorn his majestic universe, or lend to the dawn its magnificent colours: neither have we covered the earth with a verdant carpet, or bid the celestial bodies revolve in the immense expanse. He asked not council of us. We should be nothing in his eyes, if he were indifferent to our gratitude, and if he took not any pleasure in the happiness of his creatures.

In short, were we to turn our attention from so many striking proofs of the goodness of God—were they to be effaced from our memory—we should still find, in the recesses of our heart, a sufficient evidence of this comfortable truth; we should perceive that we are good and affectionate, when not perverted by passion; and we should be led to think, that such an inclination, in beings who have received every thing, must necessarily be the seal of their Divine Author. In order to exalt this sentiment, we must refer it continually to the idea of a Supreme Being; for there is, we doubt not, a correspondence of instinct and reflexion between our virtue and the perfections of him who is the origin of all things: and provided we do not resist our natural emotions, we shall perceive, from those very perfections, all that is sufficient to excite our worship and adoration; above all, whatever is necessary to serve as an example for our conduct, and to afford principles of morality.

I ought now to examine some important objections; for why should I fear to present them? A love for systems and opinions ought not to exist, in treating a subject on which so many have expatiated, and which belongs equally to all men; though we are allowed, when seeking truth eagerly, to wish to find it united to the sentiments which form our hap-

piness, and the principles which are the foundation of public order.

We admit, say some, that there are many perfections peculiar to the Supreme Being, the study and knowledge of which ought to serve to sustain the laws of morality : but one of the essential properties of the divine essence oversets the whole structure ; it is prescience : for, as God knows, beforehand, what we are to do, it follows, that all our actions are irrevocably determined ; and thus man is not free. And, if such be his condition, he deserves neither praise nor censure : he has no means of pleasing or displeasing the Supreme Being ; and the ideas of good and evil, of virtue and vice, are absolutely chimerical. I shall, at first, make a very simple reply to this objection, but a very decisive one : it is, that if, against appearances, you should happen to persuade me, that there now exists an absolute contradiction between the liberty of man, and the prescience of the Deity ; it is on the nature and extent of this prescience that I shall raise my doubts ; for, forced to choose, I should rather mistrust the judgment of my own mind, than that of an internal persuasion. It is by these same considerations, that it will always be impossible to prove to men that they are not free : we could only succeed with the assistance of reasoning : and reasoning being already a beginning of art, a kind of exterior combination of reflexions, this means, in some measure out of us, would not have power to eradicate a sentiment which seems the first that we are conscious of.

We soon discover the limits of our faculties, in the efforts which we make to acquire a just idea of the divine prescience ; we can very well suppose, that God foresees with certainty what we only conjecture about ; and in extending without end the

bounds which occur to our mind, we shall proportion, in our imagination, the knowledge of the Creator to the immensity of space, and to the infinity of time : but beyond these vague ideas we shall err in all our speculations. How is it possible, that men, who know not even the nature of their own souls, should be able to determine the nature of prescience? How is it possible, that they can know whether this prescience be the effect of a rapid calculation of him, who embraces at one glance the relations and effects of every moral and natural cause? How can they discern, whether this prescience, in an Infinite Being, be distinct from simple knowledge? How can they know whether that Being, by a property beyond our conception, do not exist before and after events, whether he be not, in some manner, the intellectual time, and whether our divisions of years and ages, would not disappear before his immoveable existence and eternal duration?

It results, however, from these considerations, that, on account of our extreme ignorance, we cannot accurately define prescience : but we are reduced to examine whether this prescience, considered in a general manner, be incompatible with the liberty of man.

This opinion, I think, should not be adopted. Prescience does not determine future events; for the mere knowledge of the future makes not the future. It is not prescience which necessitates the actions of men; because it does not change the natural order of things : but all future events are fixed, whether foreseen or not; for constraint and liberty conduct equally to a positive term : thus, all that will happen is as immutable as that which is past; since the present was the future of yesterday, and will be tomorrow the past. It is then abstractedly certain, that

an event, either foreseen or not, will take place some time ; but if liberty be not contrary to this inevitable certainty, how would it be more so, because there exists a being who is acquainted previously with the precise nature of events? We may then say, with truth, that the knowledge of the future is no more an obstacle to liberty, than the remembrance of the past ; and prophecies, like histories, are only recitals, whose place is not the same in the order of time ; but not having any influence on events, do not constrain the will, cannot enslave the sentiments, or subject men to the law of necessity.

We will confess, however, that if prescience were founded on the possibility of calculating the actions of men, like the movements of an organized machine, liberty could not exist : but then it would not be prescience which opposed this liberty ; it would be because we are automaton ; for with such a constitution, we should be without liberty, were even the Supreme Being not to have any knowledge of futurity.

It is in vain, in order to convince us we are not free, that some would represent us as necessarily submitting to the impulse of various exterior objects ; comprehending, among those objects, every thing that is subtle in moral ideas, uniting them under the general name of motives, and giving afterwards to these motives a physical force which we are bound to obey. But to be free, is it necessary that we act without motives ? then man would be indeed evidently a piece of mechanism. It is certain, that we are, in all our actions, determined by reason, taste, or a cause of preference : but it is our mind which comprehends these various considerations, which weighs, compares, and modifies : it is our mind which listens to the counsels of virtue, and which

replies to the language of our passions : it is in order to enlighten itself, that it borrows from the memory the succours of experience. It is then our mind which prepares, composes, and improves every thing which we term motives ; and it is after this intellectual labour that we act. There is too much order, unity, and harmony in our thoughts, to allow us to suppose them the mere effect of exterior objects ; which, under the form of ideas, come without order to impress themselves on our brain ; and until we are made acquainted with the works of chaos, we shall believe, with reason, that every where there is that unity, that order ; that there is a faculty capable of re-assembling every thing that is scattered, and uniting to one end all that is mixed without design.

As soon as we are impelled to believe, that there is a master of all our perceptions, and that we feel this master act, how is it possible not to be certain that it is our mind which acts ? It is then, in breaking loose from its operations, that we are stripped of our liberty, and that we at length suppose, that our will is the necessary consequence of all exterior objects, as if it were the colours, and not the painter, which produced a picture. However, if we secure our mind from that dependence, to which some wish to reduce it, our actions will not obey these irresistible emotions ; for if they grant, that we have liberty of thought, we have free will.

We ought to consider our senses as messengers, which bring to our mind new subjects of reflexion : but they are in such a manner subordinate to the sublime part of ourselves, that they act only under direction. Sometimes the ruling principle commands them to bring representations of the beauties of nature ; to examine assiduously the registers of the human mind ; to take the rule and the compass, and

render an exact account of that which it desires to know with precision. Sometimes they are taught to acquire more power : and when the soul wishes to communicate with men, when it wishes to address posterity, it orders them to perpetuate, in indelible characters, all that it has maturely combined, all that it has discovered, and all it hopes to add to the treasures of our knowledge. Is it not the master, rather than the slave of our senses, or the blind play of their caprice?

There is, besides, another observation, which seems to contrast with the absolute empire, that some are willing to grant to exterior objects over the powers of our soul ; for it is in the silence of meditation, that the action of our mind is not interrupted. We experience, that we have the power of recalling past ideas, and that we can connect those ideas, with the prospect of the future, and to various imaginary circumstances of which we compose this picture. Our reflexion is then the result, but not the work of those exterior objects we are acquainted with. These two words, work and result, which in some acceptations have a great resemblance, have here very different meanings ; and it is only in confounding them, that the objection against the existence of our liberty is favoured. We cannot form any judgment, without previously discussing every argument proper to throw a light on the subject : and the result of such enquiries determines our will. But these enquiries are themselves the work of our mind.

In short, all the degrees which lead to the end of our intellectual researches, are simple antecedents, and not absolute motives. There is, in the operations of our mind, as in every thing which is not immovable, a train of causes and effects : but this train does not characterize necessity more than liberty.

In restoring thus to our soul its original dignity, do you not perceive, that we approach nearer to nature, than in adopting those systems and explications which assimilate our intellectual faculties to the regular vibrations of a pendulum? or would you like better still to compare them to those little balls which go out of their niches to strike our brain, which by various ramifications, produce that shock which impels our will? I see, in all this, only childish figures, put in the place of those names which indicate, at least, by their abstraction, the indefinite extent of the ideas which they represent, and the respect they merit. It is easy to call a motive a little moving ball. It is easy to call uncertainty or repentance the combat of two of these balls, till the arrival of a third forms a determination, and the concurrence of many to the same point excites, in us, an impetuous passion. But who sees not, that, after having endeavoured to debase the functions of the mind, by these wretched comparisons, the difficulty remains undiminished?

In short, if the meditations and the researches of our minds, on the existence and the nature of our liberty, present us only impenetrable clouds and obscurity, is it not singular, that, in the midst of this darkness, we should reject all the information of our instinctive sentiments, which alone can clearly explain every thing that we in vain search for by other means? What would you say of a man born blind, who would not be directed by the voice? We are assuredly better instructed in the constitution of our nature by our feelings, than by metaphysical arguments: they compose an internal part of the essence of our soul: and we ought to consider them, in some measure, as a sally of the incomprehensible formation, whose mysteries we cannot penetrate. Such a

doctrine, which came to us from a divine hand, is more deserving of confidence than the interpretations of men. There are secrets which philosophers try in vain to explain: all their efforts are useless, to represent by comparison, that which is alone and without resemblance.

One would think, that nature, guessing the false reasoning which would mislead us, has purposely bestowed an inward conviction of the existence of our free will, in composing our natural life of two movements very distinct: one depends on a necessity, whose laws we are not acquainted with, and do not govern; while the other is entirely subject to the government of our reason. Such a comparison would be sufficient to convince us, if we sought merely for the truth.

When Spinoza desired to throw contempt on our instinctive perceptions, he said, it is the same as if a weather-cock, at the very moment it was the plaything of the winds, believed itself to be the cause, and consequently that it had free will. What signifies such an argument, unless it be to prove, that it is possible to suppose a fiction so perfect, that it would apparently be equivalent to a reality? But I would ask, by what foolish design of an intelligent being, or even by what fortuitous assemblage of blind nature, is it, that man should have every moment a will precisely conformable to his actions, if there be not a real correspondence between every part?

We could oppose to the hypothesis of Spinoza another argument, which would lead to a conclusion absolutely contrary; that is, if the most apparent liberty may be only a fiction, by a particular concurrence of our will with an action ordained; it is also incontestible, that were we to suppose the existence, or simple possibility of a free-will, we could not have

a different idea of it, than that which we have already ; and the liberty of God himself would not appear to our thoughts under any other form. It is very essential to remark, that when we reflect about our faculties, we with ease imagine a superior degree of intelligence, of knowledge, of memory, of foresight, and of every other property of our understanding ; liberty is the only part of ourselves to which our imagination cannot add any thing.

I shall not pursue other subtle arguments, which have been produced, to corroborate my opinion. It is not to some men, but to all, that I desire to speak ; because I wish to be universally useful. I shall then always dwell on the principal reflexions, whenever they appear to me sufficient to influence the opinion of sound minds, and to fix them on those important truths which are the surest foundation of public happiness. Self-love might induce many to follow a question as far as it would go, and vainly glory in spinning it out. But self-love, applied to profound meditations, is itself a great subtilty.

Let us examine other arguments used to combat principles which we have established. It is in vain, some will say, to endeavour to prove the existence of a God, as a real support of the laws of morality ; all this system will fall to pieces, if we be not informed, at the same time, in what manner this God rewards and punishes.

I shall observe, at first, that such an objection cannot make a very deep impression, but when it is connected in our minds with some doubt of the existence of a Supreme Being : a question that I shall not yet treat ; for supposing an internal conviction of this last truth—supposing, in all its force, the idea of a God present to our thoughts ; I ask, whether in order to please him, we should not have need of know-

ing precisely the period when we could perceive distinct signs of his approbation and beneficence? I ask, again, whether, to avoid incurring his displeasure, it would be equally necessary for us to know how, and in what manner, he would punish us? Undoubtedly not: for in taking a comprehensive view of the rewards and punishments which may proceed from a Supreme Being, struck with his grandeur, and astonished by his power, the vague idea of infinity would obtrude: and this idea, so awful, would suffice to govern our sentiments, and fix our principles of conduct. We should be careful not to propose conditions to him who has drawn us out of nothing: and we should wait with respect for the moment, when, in his profound wisdom, he may think proper to make us better acquainted with his attributes. Men may say to each other: "Secure my wages: I want them on such day: I demand them on such an hour;" they barter things of equal value, and during a short space of time; but in the intercourse of man with the Deity, what a difference!—The creature and the Creator---the child of dust and the source of life---a fleeting moment and eternity---an imperceptible atom and the Infinite Being!--our understanding is struck by the contrast! How then should we adapt to such disproportions the rules and notions which we have introduced into our trivial transactions? You require, that in order to feel the desire of pleasing the Supreme Being, he should every moment bestow gifts on those, who, by their sentiments and actions, appear worthy of his goodness; and to inspire the fear of offending him, you wish that, without delay, he would let his vengeance crush the wicked. Certainly you would be scrupulous observers of his will on such conditions; for less stable hopes and fears detain you servilely near a monarch: and

I may venture to say, that you would be equally attentive to the Ruler of the world, if, in order to reward or punish you, he were to alter the laws of nature.

But do we not, you may add, see that God does not interfere in any manner to direct things here below? You do not perceive him; but do you more clearly discover the power which gives life and motion? It is not because he does not exist, but because he is above the flight of your mind. We do not know what to say to a man who rejects the opinion of the existence of a God; for without that guide, all our ideas are wandering, and have not any other connexion but that of the wildest imagination. But if you grant, that the world had an origin, if you suppose a God, Creator, and Preserver, what arguments would you use, to induce us to believe that this God has no relation to us—that he does not take any notice of us—and that he is thus separated from the offspring of his intelligence and love? You add, vice is every where triumphant: an honest man often languishes in despondency and obscurity; and you cannot reconcile this injustice with the idea of a Divine Providence! One may at first deny the assertion which forms the basis of this reproach, or dispute at least the consequences that are drawn from it. These ideas of triumph and abasement, of splendor and obscurity, are sometimes very foreign to the internal sentiments, which only constitute happiness and misery: and for my part, I am persuaded, that if we take for a rule of comparison, not some particular situation, or some scattered events, but the whole of life, and the generality of men; we shall then find, that the most constant satisfactions attend those minds which are filled with a mild piety, firm and rational, such as the pure idea of the Deity ought

to inspire : and I am equally persuaded, that virtue, united to this piety, which knows how to soften every sacrifice, is the safest guide in the path of life. Perhaps, ignorant as we are of our nature and destination, it is not our interest that uninterrupted rewards should excite us to virtue ; for if this virtue were our title and hope with God for the present, and the time to come, we ought not to desire, that it should degenerate into an evident calculation, into a sentiment bordering on selfishness. It would then be very difficult to give a proper definition of liberty, if, by the effect of rapid justice, a constant proportion of good and evil accompanied every determination of our mind. We should then, morally, as well as physically, be impelled by an imperious instinct ; and the merit of our actions would be absolutely destroyed.

I mean by all this to ask, what would be our merit or demerit, if our life were only for an instant, and if nothing were to follow ? The persuasion of the existence of a God, without a certainty of the immortality of our soul, cannot impose any obligation : but the real connexion between these two ideas is too frequently overlooked.

Undoubtedly, left to our understanding, this word certainty is not made for us ; or at least it is not applicable to our relation with the Deity, and to the judgment we form of his designs and will. We are too far removed from the high and lofty One, who inhabits eternity, to pretend to measure his thoughts by our bounded views. They are covered with a veil ; and we always obscurely discern that which is hid in the depths of his wisdom : but the more this God, whom we adore, escapes by his immensity from our conceptions, the less have we a right to limit his perfections, in order to refuse him

the power of transporting our existence beyond the narrow circle submitted to our view; and I know not how it would be possible to persuade us, that this action of the Deity would surpass in grandeur the creation of the world, or the formation of animated beings. The habit of observing a great wonder may weaken our astonishment, but should not eradicate our admiration.

We cannot reach, but by reflexion, to those events, of which the future is still the depository. But if every thing, which surrounds us, attest the grandeur of the Supreme Being—if the mind, in its meditations, without terror, approach the confines of infinity—why mistrust that he can perform in favour of men, a magnificent union of Omnipotence and perfect goodness? Why reject, as an absurd confidence, the idea of another existence? We see, without astonishment, the feeble chrysalis force its way from the tomb it wove for itself, and appear under a new form. We cannot be anticipated witnesses of the perpetuity of our intelligence: but its vast extent would appear to us, were we not familiarized with it, a greater phenomenon than duration.

In short, why do I resist an idea of a continuation of existence, since I am forced to give credit to my birth? There is a greater distance from nothing to life, than from life to its sequel or renewal under a new form. I am clearly acquainted with the commencement of existence. I know death only by conjecture. We now enjoy the light and blessings brought to us by a beneficent heavenly Teacher; could it be, that he alone would be a stranger to his own glory and virtues? I cannot say, why this contrast makes an impression on me: but it is among the number of superficial ideas which occur to my mind, when I reflect on this subject.

A comforting thought still strikes me; the natural order of the universe appears to me a finished system. We perceive a perfect regularity between the revolution of the heavenly bodies, an invariable succession in vegetable life, an almost incredible precision in that immense quantity of volatile particles subjected to the laws of affinity; and think every thing in its right place, and that all fulfil exactly their destination in the grand and complete system of nature.

But if we turn afterwards our attention to the multitude of beings inferior to men, we shall discover also, that their action is as complete and conformable in every respect to the faculties they are endowed with; since they are governed by an imperious instinct. Full of these ideas, struck with astonishment at the appearance of an harmony so general, have we not just grounds to presume, that man, transported into infinite space by his intelligence—that man, susceptible of improvement, and continually combating obstacles—that man, in short, this most noble work of nature, only commences in this sublunary world his race? And, since all, that composes the material order of the universe, appears to us in an harmony so admirable, ought we not then to conclude, that the moral order, in which we perceive some things vague and not determinate—that the moral order is connected with another life more sublime and more astonishing than the other parts of creation, and will one day be ultimately developed? This singular disproportion between the harmony of the physical, and apparent confusion of the moral world, seems to announce a time of equilibrium and completion—a time when we shall all know its relation with the wisdom of the Creator, as we already perceive the wisdom of his designs, in the perfect agreement of the innumerable blessings of nature with

the present wants of man, and every other animated creature.

The grandeur of the human mind is indeed a vast subject of reflexion. This marvellous constitution seems to remind us perpetually of a design proportioned to such a noble conception. It seems almost unnecessary, that God should have endowed the soul with such noble faculties for such a short life as ours, to fulfil its limited plans and trivial pursuits. Thus every thing authorizes us to carry our views further. Were I to see such men as Columbus, Vesputius, Vasco de Gama, in a ship, I should not suppose that they were mere coasters.

Some try to destroy our hopes, by endeavouring to prove, that the soul is material, and that it ought to be assimilated to every thing which perishes before us : but the forms only change; the vivifying force does not perish. Perhaps the soul resembles it, but with this difference, that as it is composed of memory, reflexion, and foresight, it exists only by a series of consequences, which form the distinct attributes and particular character of its essence : it follows then, that it cannot be generalized like the blind force which animates in a universal manner vegetation ; but that every soul is, in some measure, a world to itself, and that it ought to preserve separately an identity of interest, and consciousness of preceding thoughts. Thus, in this system, the corporeal body, which distinguishes us to the eyes of others, is only the transitory habitation of that soul which is not to die---of that soul susceptible of continual improvement, and which, by degrees that we can have no idea of, will probably approach insensibly to that magnificent period, when it will be thought worthy of knowing more intimately the Author of nature.

How can we conceive the action of the soul on our senses, without a point of contact? and how conceive that contact, without the idea of matter? For it is only by experience we are acquainted with the necessity of it to occasion a motion: and without that previous knowledge, the rapidity with which one body sometimes strikes another, could only have been represented by the length of time necessary for its approach to it: however, if we had not any metaphysical knowledge of the cause of motion---and if experience only guided our judgment in this respect, why resist an idea, that there is within us a faculty which acts of itself? The intimate feeling which we have of it, is certainly an argument for its existence. We cannot, besides, maintain, that a like property may be opposite to the nature of things; since, if we adopt the system of the creation of the world, this property may proceed, like all others, from the Divine Power: and if we admit, on the contrary, the irreligious opinion of the eternity of the universe, there must have been, from eternity, a general movement without impulsion, without exterior contact, or any cause out of itself; and the action of our souls might be subject to the same laws.

The idea of the necessity of a contact, to effect a movement, would never have occurred, if we had bounded our observations to the influence of our ideas on our determinations, and the influence of those determinations on our physical being. In short, the laws of attraction and repulsion are subject to great exceptions; which exceptions may serve to support the system of the spirituality of the soul. We may be allowed to say, that there exists a vacuum in the universe, since, without this vacuum, there could not have been any motion. It is known, that this motion depends on the laws of attraction:.

but how can attraction act through a vacuum, unless it be by a spiritual force, which acts without contact, and notwithstanding the absolute interruption of matter? It is then this force, or its equivalent, that I may adopt, to define the cause of the impressions, of which our souls are susceptible.

Let others explain, in their turn, by what material communication, the sight of a few immoveable characters, traced on insensible marble, disturbs my soul. It is very easy to comprehend by what mechanism the eye distinguishes these characters: but there ends the physical action: for we cannot attribute to that action, the general power of producing sensations in the mind; since, perhaps, many other men may consider the same characters, without receiving any impression.

It is very possible, that our intellectual perceptions have not any connexion with motion, such as we conceive it. Our interior nature, which we distinguish by the name of immaterial, is probably subject to laws very different from those which govern nature in general: but as we are obliged to apply to the mysteries of our souls those expressions which serve to delineate or to interpret the phenomena submitted to our inspection; these expressions, and their continual use, have insensibly habituated us to certain opinions, about the causes and developement of our intellectual faculties. It is thus that, after having used the words, motion, rest, agitation, and action, to discriminate different affections of our souls, of which we know very little, we have afterwards assimilated them, foolishly, to our moral nature, to all the ideas which were represented by these denominations. And even death itself, of which we have not any clear knowledge, but by the dissolution of our physical being—death, an image borrowed from things which

which are under the inspection of our senses, has not, perhaps, either relation or analogy, with the nature and essence of our spirit; all these are incomprehensible secrets, not mixed with any thing we are acquainted with.

We act, in this respect, like men born deaf, who apply to sounds those terms which they were accustomed to use, to express the sensations the other senses produced.

I shall only add another observation to the ideas on which I have just dwelt. Perhaps we should never have thought of applying the words which express action and motion, to all the operations of our souls, if we had not at first divided our spiritual being into a great number of dependencies, such as attention, reflexion, thought, judgment, imagination, memory, and foresight; and if, afterwards, in order to render intelligible the variable relations of these abstract parts of our mind (these parts of a unit which we have taken to pieces, though it composed that single being, ourself) we had not been obliged to have recourse to some plain expressions, like those of action, motion, attraction, and repulsion. But this familiar use of these expressions, in order to explain the accidents of our intellectual system, very much resembles the use which we make of *X* in Algebra, to express unknown terms.

In short, were we to submit the action of our souls to the laws of a particular movement, forming one of the dependencies of the great one, we should still have to explain the cause of the consciousness that we have of this action, which atheists refuse to nature itself, at the very moment they make it the God of the universe. Were reasoning able to subject all the operations of our mind to the impressions of external objects, we could not rank under the same laws,

that consciousness which we have of our existence, and of the different faculties of the soul. This consciousness is not an effect, or the production of any known force, since it has been always in us independent of any external object; consequently we cannot investigate it. The conception of the existence of our souls, is as incomprehensible to us, as that of eternity; what a profound thought, which even our imagination cannot embrace!

Let us admit, however, for a moment, that all the operations of our souls are determined by some impulsion; whatever it may be, we shall still be struck with the absolute difference which exists, according to our knowledge, between the regular movements of matter, and the almost infinite and unaccountable emotions of our hearts and minds; so variable and so differently modified, that the attention is lost in the examination of them. And after having vainly endeavoured to conceive the union established between our thoughts and exterior objects, we have still to form an idea of the actions of these thoughts on themselves, their progression and connexion. Our mind, led astray, lost in such a meditation, leaves us only a consciousness of our weakness; and we feel, that there is an intellectual altitude which the human faculties can never reach.

We distinguish in a single character, which our judgment can decypher, an absolute difference between soul and matter. We cannot avoid representing the latter as infinitely divisible, while, on the contrary, all the efforts of our imagination could never divide that indivisible unit which composes the soul, and which is the sovereign over our will, thoughts, and all our faculties.*

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* Some say, in order to weaken this argument, that we may attribute to the indivisible unit all the qualities of mat-

But if we examine again, under another appearance, the properties of matter, we know not how to assimilate to them the emotions of our soul ; for we distinctly feel those emotions, let their number be ever so numerous; when even they act together, and terminate in the same centre, which is that Indivisible Being before alluded to ; whereas matter, by an essential property, cannot, in the same instant, be pressed or struck in several manners, unless it be in parts which have a tendency to different centres.

There is not, then, any resemblance between the impressions that our souls receive, and the various effects which may be attributed to the action of all the material substances, of which we can form any conception. They are always connected with the idea of space and extent : but that centre, where all our perceptions meet, that Judge, who dictates laws in the internal empire, whose revolutions we only know, that last Director of our will, this Indivisible Being, at the same time our friend and master, is not to be found in any compounded idea ; and this unity so simple, ought necessarily to convince us, that nothing, which is submitted to the dominion of our senses, can serve as a type of the idea which we are to form of the soul.

We discover the traces of this truth, when we fix our attention on the comparisons with which our

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ter ; that a round body is really divisible, but that roundness and impenetrability are not. Such an objection is evidently not just. Roundness and impenetrability are only qualities : and these qualities, when merely abstract, are necessarily invariable. Thus, it is as impossible to divide it, as it is to multiply and increase it ; but my soul, my thoughts, the consciousness that I have of my own existence, forms a particular and personal being : and if it were of the same nature as matter, ought to be equally divisible.

spiritual unit, our identical self, is continually occupied. We imagine it seated on a throne, listening, and examining the various reasons which ought to determine its action. We see it, like Nero, yielding sometimes to Narcissus, and sometimes to Burrhus : but at the same time that we distinctly perceive all the counsellors, all the flatterers, all the enemies which surround it ; we never remark but a single master in the midst of the tumult and the intrigues of this court.

While our soul then is thrown into motion by contemplation, and by the imperceptible modification of a fugitive idea, as well as by every thing which is opposed to material action, why should we not suppose that it is purely intelligent and spiritual ? It must be confessed, that sometimes our corporeal infirmities influence our minds. But this relation is not a proof of identity ; since our body may be an instrument entrusted to our soul, one of the organs of which it is to make a transitory use. The continuity of existence, considered abstractedly, certainly is in the universe a simple and natural state : and the temporary existence is perhaps the only one which is heterogeneous and accidental. The soul seems too noble to be assimilated to the latter state : it may exist in a different manner when joined to a material substance ; but that connexion does not make it lose its original essence.

It is to be acknowledged, that it is through the medium of our senses we know all the force of our existence ; and that they are those parts of our mixed being which strike us most, during a little while ; and it is, perhaps, by a law of the same kind, that we see men, engrossed by a great passion, entirely strangers to every other moral affection. But why should it be contrary to the nature of things, that

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the soul, once stripped of its terrestrial clothing, should be acquainted with the nature of its existence, and at the same time perceive those truths which now are obscured by clouds. An innate fire languishes a long time unknown in a rough stone : that stone is struck ; and we see issue out a splendid light. This is, perhaps, a faint picture of the state in which our soul is, when death breaks its fetters.

In short, in a matter so obscure, every supposition is admissible, which assures us, that the soul is not on earth in a state of enchantment, or in a kind of interruption of its ordinary existence. All that we see of the universe is an assemblage of incomprehensible phenomena : and when we wish to discover the conclusion, through the aid of the ideas most on a level with our intelligence, we wander perhaps from truth ; since, according to appearances, it is in the depths of infinity that it reposes.

I doubt, whether we can allow the authority of those metaphysical arguments, which are made use of to defend the spirituality of the soul, to be decisive : but they are sufficient to repulse the different attacks of materialists. The most evident opinion to me is, that we are too weak to comprehend the secret we search for. We have, according to our petty knowledge, divided the universe into two parts, spirit and matter : but this division serves only to distinguish the little we know, from that of which we have no knowledge. There is, perhaps, an infinite gradation between the different properties which compose motion and life, instinct and intelligence. We can only express the ideas conceived by our understandings : and the general words which we make use of, serve only to detect the vain ambition of our mind : but with respect to the universe, in considering its immensity, we shall find, that there is sufficient space

for all the shades and modifications we have no idea of. We confess, that it is the connexion between our physical powers and intellectual faculties, and the action that they seem to have on each other, which nourishes our doubts and anxieties; but without this relation, without the appearance of our fall, all would be distinct in the fate of man, all would be manifest. It is then, because there is a shade in the midst of the picture, which continually catches our attention, that we have need to collect the light of the mind and the feelings, in order to see in perspective our destiny; and it is from this motive, that we find it necessary, above all, to be penetrated with the idea of a God; and to search, in his power and goodness, for the last explication which we want.

There is, in the judgments of men, a contrast which I have often been struck with. Those people, who, at the sight of the immensity of the universe, at the view of the wonders, in the midst of which they are placed, fear not to attribute to our intellectual faculties the power of interpreting and understanding every thing, and even the capacity of attaining almost to the hidden secrets of our nature: these same people are, nevertheless, most eager to strip the soul of its true dignity, and the most obstinate in refusing it spirituality and duration, and every thing else which can exalt it.

But happily, these refusals or concessions fix not our fate. The nature of the soul will always be as unknown as the essence of the Supreme Being: and it is one of the proofs of its grandeur, to be wrapped up in the same mysteries which hide from us the universal spirit. But there are simple ideas and sentiments, which seem to bring along with them more comfort and hope than metaphysical arguments.

We cannot profoundly meditate on the marvellous attributes of thought---we cannot attentively contemplate the vast empire which has been submitted to it, or reflect on the faculty with which it is endowed, of fixing the past, approaching the future, and bringing into a small compass the expanded views of nature, and of containing, if I may use the phrase, in one point, the infinity of space, and the immensity of time---we cannot consider such a wonder, without continually uniting a sentiment of admiration to the idea of an end worthy of such a grand conception, worthy of him whose wisdom we adore. Shall we, however, be able to discover this end, in the passing breath, in the fleeting moments which compose life? Shall we be able to discover it in a succession of phantoms, which seem destined only to trace the progress of time? Shall we, above all, perceive it in this general system of destruction? And ought we to annihilate in the same manner the insensible plant, which perishes without having known life---and the intelligent man, who every day explores the charms of existence? Let us not thus degrade our fate and nature: and let us judge and hope better of that which is unknown. Life, which is a means of improvement, should not lead to an eternal death: the mind, that prolific source of knowledge, should not be lost in the dark shades of forgetfulness. Sensibility and all its mild and pure emotions, which so tenderly unite us to others, and enliven our days, ought not to be dissipated as if it were the vapour of a dream: conscience, that severe judge, was not intended to deceive us: and piety and virtue are not vainly to elevate our views towards that model of affection, the object of our love and adoration. The Supreme Being, to whom all times belong, seems already to have sealed our union

with futurity, by endowing us with foresight, and placing in the recesses of our heart the passionate desire of a longer duration, and the confused sentiment which it gives of obtaining it. There are some relations still obscure, some connexions between our moral nature and futurity ; and perhaps our wishes, our hopes, are a sixth sense, a faint sense, if I may be allowed to express myself so, of which we shall one day experience the satisfaction. Sometimes also I imagine, that love, the most noble ornament of our nature, love, sublime enchantment, is a mysterious pledge of the truth of these hopes ; for in disengaging us from ourselves, transporting us beyond the limits of our being, it seems the first step towards an immortal nature : and in presenting to us the idea, in offering to us the example of an existence out of ourselves, it seems to interpret by our feelings that which our minds cannot comprehend.

7 In short, and this reflexion is the most awful of all, when I see the mind of man grasp at the knowledge of a God---when I see him, at least, draw near to such a grand idea---such a sublime degree of elevation prepares me, in some manner, for the high destiny of the soul. I search for a proportion between this immense thought and all the interests of the world ; and I discover none. I search for a proportion between these boundless meditations and the narrow picture of life ; and I perceive none. There is then, I doubt not, some magnificent secret beyond all that we can discern ; some astonishing wonder behind this curtain, still unfurled ; on all sides we discover the commencement of it. How imagine, how resolve the thought, that all which affects and animates us, all which guides and captivates us, is a series of enchantments, an assemblage of illu-

sions? The universe and its majestic pomp would then have been only destined to serve as the theatre of a vain representation : and such a grand idea, so magnificent a conception would have had for an object a mere dazzling chimera. What would then have signified that mixture of real beauties and false appearances? What had signified that concourse of phantoms, which, without design or end, would be less admirable than a ray of light, destined to enlighten our abode? In short, what had signified in men that union of sublime thoughts and deceitful hopes? Guard us from giving credit to such a supposition! Is it to him, then, whose power has not any limits, that we dare to attribute the artifices of weakness? Should we have seen every where order, design, and exactness, as far as our understanding can reach---and as soon as we are arrived at the utmost boundary of our faculties, should we stop the views of the Supreme Intelligence, and imagine, that all is finished, because futurity is unknown? Alas! we endure but a moment; and we presume to know the past and the future! But grant us only the idea of a God; do not deprive us of our confidence in him; it is in relying on that grand truth, that we shall be able to guard our hopes against all the metaphysical arguments, which we are not immediately prepared to answer.

Would you object, that hope is not sufficient to determine men to the observance of morality, and to subject them to the sacrifices which the practice of virtue seems to impose? What then attracts them, in all the bustle of life, unless it be hope? what is it that renders them greedy of honour and of fortune, unless it be expectation? And when they obtain the object of their wishes, they have frequently only the imaginary advantages hope created. Why then

would you ask for a demonstrated certainty, in order to devote yourself to all the researches which the human mind can conceive to be the most grand, the most worthy of an ardent pursuit? On the contrary, the most trifling degree of expectation should become a motive of encouragement. And what is it, of all our interests, which could be put in competition with the most fugitive idea, with the slightest hope, of pleasing the master of the world, and maintaining the intercourse which seems to be indicated by our natural sentiments, and by the first perceptions of our minds?

I would wish to go still further, and I would demand, not of all men, but of some at least, if, were even this life to be their only heritage, they would think themselves freed from the desire of pleasing the Sovereign Author of nature? The moment that is given us to know and admire him, would it not still be a blessing? We celebrate the memory of those princes who have done good to men; are we not to do the same with him to whom we are indebted for our existence; to him who has contrived, if I may be allowed to say so, the various enjoyments we are so unwilling to detach ourselves from? Shall we dare, weak and ignorant as we are, to measure the wisdom, and calculate the power of our Benefactor, and rashly reproach him for not having done more for us? This would be the language of ingratitude. But, as I have shown, our sentiments have not been put to this test: and it is on more liberal terms that we have been admitted to treat with the Supreme Being. He has surrounded us with every thing, that can encourage our expectations. He allows us, by contemplation, to attain almost a knowledge of his perfections. He lets us read them in that collection of glory and magnificence which the universe displays. He per-

mits us to perceive his power and goodness, infinity and happiness; and by that succession of ideas he has guided our wishes and our hopes. How grand is the contemplation of the Eternal, they who have sensibility can tell! But this idea should be very early implanted in the human heart; it is necessary that it should be connected with our first feelings; that it should rise by degrees, in order to gain strength, before men are thrown into the midst of that world which boasts of being freed from childish prejudices—lest, hurried along by its levity, they follow every day a new master, and render themselves the slaves of pleasure and vanity.

And that which is to maintain, among men, the principles first inculcated, is public worship, an idea as beautiful as simple, and the most proper to vivify all that is vague and abstract in reasoning and instruction. Public worship, in assembling men, and in turning them without public shame to their weaknesses, and in equalizing every individual before the Master of the world, will be, in this point of view, a grand lesson of morality. But this worship, besides, habitually reminds some of their duty; and is for others a constant source of consolation. In short, almost all men, astonished and overwhelmed by the ideas of grandeur and infinity, which the appearance of the universe, and the exercise of their own thoughts, present to them, aspire to find repose in the sentiment of adoration which unites them in a more intimate manner to God, than the developement of their reason ever will.

We should guard ourselves carefully from despising the emotions of piety, which cannot be separated from its advantages: and philosophers themselves know not how far they would go, when they try to reduce the interest of men to the narrow circle of

demonstrated truths. That which we perceive confusedly, is more precious than all we have a certain knowledge of. That which we anticipate, is of more value than the blessings scattered round us. Thus, we should be miserably impoverished, if they could cut off the various comforts which we shall never possess, but through the aid of imagination. However, if we take this imagination as a guide and encouragement, when we are engaged in the pursuits of fortune and ambition---and if the wise themselves find that to be good which serves to nourish our passions---why would you reject it, when, simply more grand and more sublime in its object, it becomes the support of our weaknesses, the safeguard of our principles, and the source of our most interesting consolations?

It is the part of legislators to study these truths, and to direct towards them the spirit of laws, and the uncertain course of opinions. How honourable is it for them to be called to form the august alliance, which is to unite happiness with morality, and morality with the existence of a God!

T W E L F T H C H A P T E R .

That there is a God.

THAT there is a God! How is it possible to avoid being penetrated with an awful respect in uttering these words? How reflect on them without the deepest humility, and even an emotion of surprise, that man, this weak creature, this atom dispersed in the immensity of space, undertakes to add

some weight to a truth, of which all nature is the splendid witness? However, if this truth be our supreme good, if we be nothing without it, how can we banish it from our minds? Does it not constrain us to dwell continually on the subject? Compared with it, all other thoughts are insignificant and uninteresting. It gives birth to, and sustains all the sentiments on which the happiness of an intelligent creature depends. I confess, I tremblingly discussed the different objections which are employed to destroy our confidence in the existence of a Supreme Being. I dreaded the melancholy which those arguments produced. I was afraid to feel the impression of it myself, and thus to hazard the opinion most dear to my heart, and most essential to my happiness. It appeared to me, that a few general ideas, supported by lively feelings, would have been sufficient for my tranquillity : and without an interest more extended, without the desire of opposing, according to my powers, a spirit of indifference and false philosophy, which is every day gaining ground, I should never have stepped beyond my circle. But I am far from regretting the part I have taken. I have ran over, without much trouble, those books where the most pernicious doctrines are ingeniously disseminated ; and have thought, that a person, endowed with common sense, on whom metaphysical subtleties were obtruded, would resemble those savages, who are brought sometimes among us, and who, from the depraved refinement of our morals and manners, have often recalled us, by some natural reflexions, to those simple principles which we have abandoned, to those antient truths whose vestiges are lost.

The whole structure of religion would be overturned, if, by the strength or artifices of reasoning,

men could destroy our confidence in the existence of a Supreme Being. Morality, being detached from the opinions which sustain it, would remain a wavering, unsupported notion, only defended by a policy, whose power time would insensibly weaken. A fatal languor invading every mind, where would be that universal interest, that sentiment felt by all men, and proper to form a general alliance between them? Then those, who with pure intentions, can only be guided and sustained by an intimate persuasion, would retire sad, and leave to others the care of supporting moral order by fictions and falsehoods. They would pity that discoloured race, called to appear and pass away like flowers, which bloom but for a day. They would despise those animated phantoms, which only come to make a buzz with their vanity and trivial passions, and fall, in a little while, into eternal oblivion. All that appears beautiful in the universe, and excites our enthusiasm, would soon lose its splendor and enchantment, if we perceived nothing in this brilliant scene, but the play of some atoms, and the uniform walk of blind necessity: for it is always because a thing may be otherwise, that it acquires a claim to our admiration. In short, that soul, that spirit, which vivifies man—that faculty of thought which surprises and confounds those who reflect—would only appear a vain movement, if nothing were before, or were to follow—if some unknown breath, or general intelligence, did not animate nature. But we have dwelt too long on those gloomy thoughts. Re-assume your light and life, admirable works of God. Come, and confound the pride of some, and comfort others. Come, and take possession of our souls, and direct our affections towards him whom we ought to love—towards him who is the eternal model of perfect wisdom, and unlimited goodness!

I shall not endeavour to prove, that there is a God, by reciting all the wonders the works of nature display to our eyes. Several celebrated writers have already done it, and have missed their aim. Infinity can only be represented by astonishment and respect, which overwhelms all our thoughts : and when we labour to explain the successive and varied picture of the wonders of nature, this change of objects is more calculated to relax our admiration than to increase it ; for any change eases our mind, by affording those relaxations which our weakness has need of ; and if we were to investigate only one phenomenon, we should soon discover the utmost extent of our faculties. We find the limits of our understanding in the examination of the organization of the smallest insect, as well as in observing the faculties of the soul : and the mysteries of the simplest vegetation are as far above the reach of our intelligence, as the principal agent of the universe.

It is then as a hymn of praise to the Supreme Being, and not as necessary instruction, that I freely follow the course of my thoughts. I shall begin by throwing a rapid glance on the principal characters of wisdom and grandeur, which we are all equally struck with, when we contemplate the wonder of the universe.

What a sight is that of the world ! What a magnificent picture for those who can be roused out of the state of indifference, in which habit has thrown them ! We know not where to begin, or stop, when we expatiate on so many wonders : and the most noble of all is, the faculty which has been bestowed on us of admiring and conceiving them. What an astonishing and sublime relation is that of the innumerable beauties of nature, with the intelligence which permits us to enjoy, and to be made happy by

them ! What relation so surprising, as that of the order and harmony of the universe, with the moral intelligence which enables us to anticipate the enjoyments of wisdom and unclouded knowledge ! Nature is immense, and all that it contains, all that it spreads with so much splendor, seems within the reach of our sensibility, or the powers of our mind : and these faculties, invisible and incomprehensible, unite to form that wonder of wonders, which we call felicity. Let not these plain words turn our attention from the magical ideas which they represent. It is because the grand phenomena of our existence cannot either be defined or expressed many ways, that they are so much more wonderful ; and those words, used by common consent, soul, mind, sensation, life, happiness, and many others besides, which we pronounce so slightly, confound not less our understanding, when we wish to discuss the essence of the properties of which they are the sign. It is for this reason, among several others, that the admiration of particulars, in the works of nature, is always insufficient for those who have sensibility ; as such admiration is necessarily placed between two ideas susceptible of being known—ideas which we connect through the aid of our own knowledge. But the charm of our relation with the wonders which surround us, arises from experiencing every instant the impression of an infinite grandeur—and feeling the necessity of flying to that mild refuge of ignorance and weakness, the sublime idea of a God. We are continually carried towards this idea by the vain efforts which we make, in order to penetrate the secrets of our own nature : and when I fix my attention on those astonishing mysteries, which seem to terminate, in some manner, the power of our thoughts, I represent them with

emotion, as the only barrier which separates us from the infinite Spirit, the source of all knowledge.

Men endowed with the greatest genius, perceive quickly the bounds of their faculties, when they wish to go very far in the study of abstract metaphysical truths. But the simplest and least exercised mind can distinguish the proofs of that order, which with so much splendor announces the end and design of sovereign wisdom. It seems, that all the knowledge proper to interest men has been placed within their reach. The learned astronomer, observing the course of the globe round the sun, perceives the cause of that regular succession of repose and vegetation, which secures the earth its fecundity, and adorns every season with renewed beauties : but the simple cultivator, who sees the treasures of the earth renovated every year, and answer, with singular precision, to the wants of animated beings, is not less a witness of a phenomenon which is sufficient to excite his admiration and gratitude ! Newton analyzed light, and calculated the swiftness with which it runs over the immensity of space : but the ignorant herdsman, who sees, when he wakes, his hut enlightened by the same rays which animate all nature, is equally benefited by them. The indefatigable anatomist attains a just idea of our inimitable structure, and the ingenious texture of our different organs : but the man most devoid of instruction, who reflects an instant on the pleasures, and the variety of the sensations, which we find ourselves susceptible of, partakes the blessing equally.

The transcendent knowledge of some people, is a degree of superiority which disappears when contrasted with the incomprehensible grandeur of nature. When we contemplate infinity, those talents which exalt one man above another are no more seen ;

and probably it is beyond the limits of our intelligence that the greatest wonders of nature begin. The knowledge of all ages has not explained what is the imperious authority of our will over our actions, nor how our thoughts could reach the most remote ages, how our souls could investigate that innumerable multitude of present objects, of recollections and anticipations: neither has it informed us how all those excellencies of the mind, sometimes remain unknown to itself, nor how they are sometimes at its command, issuing out of their long obscurity, and succeeding each other with method, or are profusely poured forth. At the sight of these astonishing phenomena, we think man presumptuous, when, puffed up with pride, he mistakes the measure of his strength, and wishes to penetrate into the secrets, whose confines are shut up by an invisible hand. He should be content to know, that his existence is united to so many wonders; he should be satisfied with being the principal object of the liberality of nature, and he should adore, with reverential respect, that powerful Sovereign, who bestows so many blessings on him, and who has made him to sympathize with all the powers of heaven and earth.

The globe on which we live runs over every year a space of two hundred millions of leagues; and in this immense course, its distance from the sun, determined by immutable laws, is exactly proportioned to the degree of the temperature necessary to our feeble nature, and to the successive return of that precious vegetation, without which no animated being could subsist.

That celestial body, which fertilizes the seeds of life shut up in the bosom of the earth, is, at the same time, the source of that light which opens to our view the glorious sight of the universe. The rays of

the sun run over, in eight minutes, about thirty millions of leagues: such an impetuous motion would be sufficient to pulverise the largest masses of matter: but, by an admirable combination, such is the incomprehensible tenuity of these rays, that they strike the most tender of our organs, not only without wounding it—but with a measure so delicate and precise, that they excite in us those extatic sensations, which are the origin and the indispensable condition of our greatest enjoyments.

Man, in immensity, is only an imperceptible point: and yet, by his senses and intelligence, he seems in communication with the whole universe. But how pleasant and peaceable is this communication! It is almost that of a prince with his subjects. All is animated round man; all relates to his desires and wants. The action of the elements, every thing on earth, like the rays of light, seems to be proportioned to his faculties and strength: and while the celestial bodies move with a rapidity which terrifies our imagination, and while, in their course, they hurry along our dwelling, we are tranquil in the bosom of an asylum, and under the protecting shelter allotted us; we enjoy there in peace a multitude of blessings, which, by another wonderful affinity, ally themselves to our taste and all the sentiments we are endowed with.

In short, and it is another favour, man is permitted to be, in some things, the contriver of his own happiness, by his will and ingenuity. He has embellished his habitation, and united several ornaments to the simple beauties of nature. He has improved, by his care, the salutary plants, and even in those, which seemed the most dangerous, he has discovered some wholesome property, and carefully separated it from the envenomed parts which surrounded it. He can soften metals, and make them serve to augment his strength. He obliges the marble to obey him, and

assume what form he desires. He gives laws to the elements, or circumscribes their empire. He stops the invasion of the sea. He restrains the rivers in their natural bed, and sometimes obliges them to take a different course, in order to spread their benign influence. He erects a shelter against the fury of the winds, and, by an ingenious contrivance, makes use of that impetuous force, which he could not at first dream of defending himself from. Even the fire, whose terrible action seems to presage destruction, he subjugates; and renders it, if I may so express myself, the confidant of his industry, and the companion of his labours.

What a source of reflexions is this dominion of the mind over the most dreadful effects of the movement of blind matter! It seems as if the Supreme Being, in submitting thus to the intelligence of men the most powerful elements, chose to give us an anticipation of the empire which his sovereign wisdom has over the universe.

However, it is in the influence of our spiritual faculties on themselves, that we observe, above all, their admirable nature: we see, with astonishment, the perfection which they acquire by their own action. Intelligence considered in a general manner, undoubtedly is a great phenomenon: but it is a still greater wonder, to see the thoughts of a man reach, by the most ingenious means, the knowledge of others, and form an alliance between the past and present productions of the mind. It is by such an alliance, that the sciences have been improved, and that the mind of man has been acquainted with all its strength. The mighty of the earth cannot break this association, nor subject to their tyrannic divisions the noble heritage of knowledge. This gift, so precious, preserves the stamp of a divine hand;—and no one has yet been able to say “it is mine.”

The most noble use that has ever been made of the admirable union of so many talents, and so much knowledge, was to demonstrate how every thing in nature relates to the idea of a first cause ; which forcibly announces a design full of wisdom, and a beneficent intention. But now, unhappily, these proofs of the existence of a God are not sufficient. Imperious philosophers have laboured to subvert every thing founded on the connexion and wonderful harmony of the system of nature. It is not sufficient to oppose to these new opinions the mere authority of final causes. They do not contest that there is a perfect conformity between our desires and wants, between our senses and the bounties of nature : they do not contest, from the cedar to the hyssop, from the insect to man, that there is a beauty of proportion in the whole, which is to be found equally in the relation that objects have with each other, as well as in their different parts. But this admirable harmony, in which the pious man, the man of feeling, perceives with delight the stamp of an eternal intelligence---others, less fortunate, undoubtedly, obstinately present to us as a fortuitous collision, as a play of atoms agitated by a blind movement, or as nature itself, existing thus from all eternity. What trouble they take to invent and defend these systems, destructive of our happiness and hopes! I prefer my feelings to all this philosophy : but to avoid an encounter would be to favour their presumption, and give additional strength to their opinions.

I shall treat the most important question that man can consider, in this manner : I shall endeavour first to show that the different conjectures on the origin of the world all centre in the single opinion of the eternal and necessary existence of every thing which is : and I shall afterwards compare the basis of that

system with the reason of that happy and simple belief which unites the idea of a Supreme Being with all we see and know ; in short to the universe, the most unlimited of our conceptions.

THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The same subject continued.

WHEN we see the authors of the different systems, concerning the formation of the world, reject the idea of a God, under the pretext, that this idea is foreign to the nature of our perceptions, should we not have a right to expect some better substitute for it ? But far from answering our expectations, they abandon themselves to all the wanderings of the most fantastic imagination. In fact, whether we refer the origin of the universe to the effect of hazard, the fortuitous concurrence of atoms, or establish another hypothesis, derived from the same principle, it is necessary at least, to suppose the eternal existence of an innumerable multitude of little particles of matter, placed without order in the immensity of space ; and to suppose, afterwards, that these atoms, disseminated to infinity, attracted each other, and corresponded by the inherent properties of their nature ; and that there resulted, from their adhesion, not only organized, but intelligent faculties ; it is necessary, in short, to suppose, that all those incomprehensible atoms have been settled with admirable order through the effect of a blind motion, and by the result of some of the possible chances in the infinity of accidental combinations. Indeed, after so many suppositions, without example or foun-

dation, that of an Intelligent Being, foul and director of the universe, had been more analogous and more consonant with our knowledge.

Let us return to the hypothesis we have just mentioned. We shall then recognize the trifling habit of the mind. It is accustomed to proceed from simple to compound ideas, every time it meditates, invents, or executes : thus, by an inverse method, the composers of systems have thought, that, in order to connect the universe to its origin, it was sufficient to detach, by the exercise of thinking, all its parts, and to break and subdivide them afterwards to infinity. But whatever may be the tenuity of these atoms, their existence, having organized and intellectual properties which we should be obliged to grant them, would be a wonder almost equal to those phenomena which surround us.

When we see a plant grow, embellished with different colours, we only think of the period when its vegetation may be perceived by our senses. But the seed of this plant, or if you like better, the organized atoms, the first principle of this seed, would have offered also a grand subject of admiration, if we had been endowed with the faculties necessary to penetrate into the occult secrets of nature. But perhaps, in transforming into an imperceptible powder all the parts of matter, which have been collected to compose the world, we have only before our eyes a fugitive vapour, to which even our imagination cannot reach : and those, who unfortunately love and defend this admiration, find besides, in the system of divisible atoms, means to defer, according to their fancy, the moment of their astonishment.

All these fantastic combinations serve only to lead us astray in our researches : and I do not think it a matter of indifference to make a general observation :

The study of the first elements of all the sciences which we acquire, such as geometry, languages, civil legislation, and several others, appears to us the simplest part of our instruction. It is not the same, when we seek to know the laws of the physical world; for the works of nature never appear more simple, than in their compounded state. They are then, to our mind, that which harmony is to the ear. It is the agreement of all parts which forms a union perfectly proportioned to our intelligence. Thus man, for example, that wonderful alliance of so many different faculties, does not astonish our understanding, but appears to us in one point of view, a simple idea; but we are troubled, and, as it were, dismayed, when we try to analyze him, or mount to the elements of his liberty, will, thought, and all the other properties of his nature.

We only advance towards infinity, and consequently towards the most profound darkness, when we destroy the world, in order to divide it into atoms, out of the midst of which we make it issue afresh, after having rallied all we have dispersed.

Let us admit, for a moment, that there exist organized and intelligent atoms, and that they are such, either by their nature, or by their adhesion to other atoms. We are now, of all these scattered atoms, to compose the universe, that master-piece of harmony, and perfect assemblage of every beauty and variety, that inexhaustible source of every sentiment of admiration; and in rejecting the idea of a God, Creator and Preserver, we must have recourse to the power of chance, that is to say, to the effects of an unknown continual motion, which, without any rule, produces, in a limited time, all the combinations imaginable. But, in order to effect an infinite variety of combinations, it is not only necessary to

admit a continual motion, but, besides, to suppose this continual motion changes its direction in all the parts of space subject to its influence. The existence of such a change, and a similar diversity in the laws of motion, is a new supposition which may be ranked with the other wild ones.

However, after these chimerical systems have been granted, we are not freed from the difficulties which the notion of the formation of the world by a fortuitous concurrence of atoms produces.

It is difficult to comprehend how particles of matter, agitated in every manner, and susceptible, as has been supposed, of an infinity of different adhesions, should not have formed such a mixture, such a con-texture, as would have rendered the harmonious composition of the universe in all its parts impossible.

When we represent to ourselves, abstractedly, the unlimited number of chances that may be attributed to a blind movement, the imagination, unable to conceive, is left to guess, how an infinite number of atoms, endowed with a property of uniting themselves, under an infinite diversity of movements, could compose the heavenly bodies. But as, long before that period, when such an accidental throw would become probable, these same atoms might have formed an innumerable multitude of partial combinations; if one of these combinations had been incompatible with the harmony and composition of a world, that world could not have been formed.

The same considerations may be applied to animated beings. Chance might have produced men susceptible of life, and the transmission of it, long before chance gave them all the faculties which they enjoy: and if they had been formed with only four senses, they could not have acquired a fifth—for the same reason that we do not see a new one spring

up. Besides, the chance, which might have produced living beings, must have always preceded the chance which afforded those beings every thing necessary for their subsistence and preservation.

It may, indeed, be supposed, that atoms assembled in a manner incompatible with the disposition of the universe, have been separated by the continuation of the motion introduced into the immensity of space. But this continual motion, sufficient to sever that which it has joined, would it not have destroyed that harmony which has been the result of one of the fortuitous chances to which the formation of the world has been attributed?

Will some object, that all the parts of matter, once united in the masses and proportions which constitute the heavenly bodies, have been maintained by the impression of a predominant force at the same time invariable? But how is it possible to reconcile the existence and dominion of such a force with that continual motion, which was requisite for the composition of the universe?

It may be also demonstrated, that the formation of worlds, by the chances of a blind motion, and their regular continuity of existence, are two propositions which disagree. Let us explain this idea. The play of atoms, necessary in order to produce the unformed masses of the heavenly bodies, being infinitely less complicated than that which is necessary to produce them, inhabited as they are with intelligent beings, must have happened long before the other. Thus, in the system of the composition of the universe, by the fortuitous concurrence of atoms, it is necessary to suppose, that these atoms, after having been united to form the heavenly bodies, have been severed, and united again, as many times as was necessary to produce a planet inhabited by intelligent

beings. Since beings thus endowed add nothing to the stability of the world---since they do not contribute to the grand coalition of all its parts---why the same blind motion which has united, dissolved, and assembled so often every part of the earth, before it was composed, such as it is; why does it not produce some alteration now? It should again reduce to powder our world, or, at least, let us perceive the commencement of some new form.

It is not only to a world inhabited by intelligent beings, that the arguments, just mentioned, may be applicable; for we perceive around us an innumerable multitude of beauties and features of harmony, which were not necessary to the preservation of our world, and which, according to every rule of probability, would never have existed, unless we supposed, that the earth has been formed, dissolved, and reproduced, an infinity of times, before having been composed such as we see it: but then, I would ask, why there were no vestiges of those alterations, and why that motion has stopped?

It would be possible, however, by the assistance of a new supposition, to resolve the difficulty I have just mentioned. Some may say, that the union, and the successive dispersion of the universal atoms, are executed in a space of time, so slow and insensible, that our observations, and all those which we have from tradition, cannot inform us whether there will not be a separation of all the parts of the universe, by the same causes which have occasioned their adhesion.

It is obvious, that transporting us into infinity, and admitting such a series of arbitrary suppositions, they are not indeed exposed to any rational attacks: but making equally free with infinity, in order to oppose nonsense to nonsense, why may I not be al-

lowed to suppose, that in the infinite combinations arising from perpetual motion, men have been created, destroyed, and again called into being, with the same faculties, remembrances, thoughts, relations and circumstances; and why each of us, separated from our former existence, only by a sleep, whose duration is imperceptible, (should not be in our own eyes immortal beings? Infinity permits the supposition of this absurd hypothesis; as it authorises every flight of the imagination in which time is reckoned for nothing. We see, however, how we risk running into error, when, with our limited faculties, we wish to subject the incomprehensible idea of infinity, and boldly adjust it to the combinations of finite beings.

Let us produce, however, another objection. It may be said, that our planet is the result of chance: but is not this chance improbable, if we suppose, that there existed in the infinity of space, an infinite number of other assembled atoms, equally produced by the first throw of the dice, which represent all the possible forms, and imaginable proportions? And I would also ask, by what laws all these irregular bodies, necessarily subject, by reason of their number and masses, to an infinity of movements, have not disconcerted the planetary system formed, at the same time as they were, by chance?

I ought to observe, above all, that the order which we are acquainted with, is a proof of universal order; for, in immensity, where one part is nothing, compared with the whole, no part, without exception, could be preserved, unless it were in equilibrium with every other.

Thus, whether an infinite succession of chances be supposed, to which the entire mass of atoms has been uniformly subject—or whether the first general

throw be thought sufficient, but divided into an infinity of different sections—our reason opposes invincible difficulties to the result which some want to draw from these various systems.

In short, we must observe, that in order to understand the accidental formation of a world, such as we are at liberty to suppose, the eternal existence of every kind of organized and intelligent atoms, must have preceded the formation of that world. I must again observe, that when they are obliged to such wonderful first principles, and to admit, in the beginning, a nature so astonishing, we can scarcely conceive how they can make it act suddenly a foolish part, in order to finish the work of the universe: a more exalted supposition would have prevented their drawing a conclusion so absurd.

It seems to me, that, notwithstanding the immensity which has given rise to so many ridiculous notions about the formation of the world, they have such a resemblance to each other, that we can scarcely discern any difference: and considering the little circle which the imagination runs over, when it applies its force to deep conceptions, we think we discover something supernatural in its singular weakness: the authors of these systems seem to have a slavish turn of thinking, and the marks of their chains are very visible. It is always atoms and atoms, that they make play together, either at different times, or all at once, in infinite space: but when some want to form ideas of liberty and will, as they do not know in what manner to analyze these properties, they suppose them pre-existing in the elementary parts, which they made use of to create their universe: and they prudently take care not to grant any action to liberty and will, in order to prevent any resistance to those notions on which they build their universe.

They would not render either more simple or credible, the blind production of worlds, by supposing not only an innumerable multitude of organized atoms, but even an infinite diversity of molds to hold the atoms, and of which force chemical analogy gives us an idea. Such a system, which might serve to explain a few secondary causes of our known nature, is not applicable to the first formation of beings; for with such an assemblage of molds and atoms, all the great difficulties would still subsist. In fact, how should the different molds have classed themselves properly, in order to form the most simple whole, but which beside required a fixed measure and gradation of ranks? The mold destined for the organized atoms, of which the crystalline is to be composed, how is it possible it should have placed itself in the centre of that mold which is to form the pupil of the eye, and this last on that one which is to form the whole, and so on, by an exact gradation, whose divisions and subdivisions are innumerable?

Were they to suppose an infinite succession of molds, of which the largest attracted the smallest, in the same manner as the molds attracted the atoms; this supposition, less ridiculous than any other, is not sufficient to model, even in imagination, the most unimportant phenomena of nature. It is necessary, besides, that by the direction of a wise and powerful force, the molds, and the atoms which belong to them, set themselves in motion, without confusion; it is necessary, that those destined to compose the exterior fibres should not obstruct the passage of those molds calculated to form the interior organs; in short, that everyone of those in its course and expansion, should artfully observe those delicate shades, which blend or separate all the parts of the simplest of nature's works.

We are already acquainted with a force which acts in all directions, which disposes every thing in due order, tends towards an end, stops, begins again, and finishes, every moment, a complicated work: and this is the intelligent will. And certainly we have reason to be astonished, that the only faculty we have an intimate consciousness of, is the one philosophers turn from, when they investigate the admirable order of the universe.

I allow, that they may, at the same time they reject the idea of a God, admit, as a principle, the eternal existence of a mechanical force, which, by an incomprehensible necessity, directed, towards a wise end, every thing that was at first confusedly scattered in the immensity of space. But this new supposition would form an hypothesis similar to the system of the eternal existence of the universe: in fact, the eternal existence of all the elements, of all substances, forces, and properties which were necessary to produce a certain order of things, would be a phenomenon as incomprehensible as the existence of that order itself.

We must add, that these two phenomena would be separated in our thoughts only by an indivisible instant—an instant that we can neither describe nor imagine, in the extent of the time represented by eternity; for any chosen period would be still too late, by an infinity of ages. The necessary effect of an eternal cause has not, like that cause, any period to which we can fix its commencement.

We thus perceive, under another point of view, how vain and ridiculous are the fantastic operations, they imagine, before the existence of the world, and which are attributed sometimes to the disordered movements of chance, and sometimes to the regular laws of blind necessity.

There is then but one hypothesis to be opposed to the idea of a God: It is the system of the eternal existence of the universe. Such an atheistical system will always be more easily defended than any other; because, being founded on a supposition without bounds, it does not require to be embraced by reasoning, like all the hypothetical ideas, by which men make nature act according to an order of their own invention. We will, in the next chapter, consider this system, and discuss it by every means in our power.

FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The same subject continued.

THOSE who maintain that the world subsists of itself, and that there is not a God, say, in favour of their opinion, that if the eternal existence of the universe overwhelm our understanding, the eternal existence of a God is a still more inconceivable idea; and that such a supposition is only another difficulty, since, according to a common mode of judging, a work the most wonderful appears a phenomenon less astonishing than the knowledge of which it is the result.

Let us first fix our attention on this argument. It is useless to ask, what is meant by another difficulty in infinity. Those ideas, which are represented by familiar expressions, necessarily derived from comparison, are only admissible in the narrow circle of our knowledge. Out of it, those ideas have not any application: and we cannot fix any degrees in the immensity which exceeds the bounds of our views, and in those unfathomable depths which are out of the reach of our intellectual powers.

Undoubtedly, our mind is equally lost, both in trying to form a distinct idea of a God, and in endeavouring to describe the eternal existence of the world, without any cause out of itself. However, when we try to glance our thoughts towards the first traces of time—when we try to rise almost to the beginning of beginnings, we feel distinctly, that, far from considering the eternal existence of an intelligent cause as increasing the difficulty, we only find repose in that opinion; and instead of forcing our mind to adopt such an opinion, and thinking we wander in an imaginary space, we find it, on the contrary, more congenial with our nature; while order unites itself to the idea of a design, and a multiplicity of combinations to the idea of an intelligence. Thus we rise from little to great things; and, reasoning by analogy, we shall more easily conceive the existence of a Being endowed with various unlimited properties, which we in part partake---we shall, I say, more easily conceive such an existence, than that of a universe, where all would be intelligent, except the first mover. The workman, undoubtedly, is superior to the work: but according to our manner of feeling and judging, an intelligent combination, formed without intelligence, will always be the most extraordinary, as well as the most incomprehensible phenomenon.

It is not indifferent to observe, that, according to the system I combat, the more the world would appear to us the admirable result of wisdom, the less power should we have to draw any deduction favourable to the existence of a God; since the author of a perfect work is not so easily traced as the feeble re-iterated labours of mediocrity. Thus, all those who particularized the beauties of nature, would stupidly injure the cause of religion, and

weaken our belief in the existence of a Supreme Being. It seems to me, that it is easy to perceive what an ill-founded argument that must be, which leads us to a conclusion so absurd.

The attentive view of the universe should make us mistrust the judgment, which we form, of that which is the most simple in the order of things; for all the general operations of nature arise from a movement more noble and complicated than we can easily form an idea of. We should surely find, contrary to a perfect simplicity of means, that a circuit of two hundred millions of leagues, which our globe makes every year, is necessary, in order to produce the successive changes of seasons, and to assure the reproduction of the necessary fruits; we should find, that the distance of thirty-four millions of leagues, between the sun and the earth, was necessary to proportion the rays of light to the delicacy of our organs. However, if even in the narrow circle we traverse, we do not discover any constant application of that simple order, of which we form an idea, how could such a principle serve to guide our opinions, at the moment when we elevate our meditations to the first link of the vast chain of beings---when we undertake to examine, whether, throughout the immensity of the universe, there exist, or, not, an intelligent cause? What would become, in that immensity, of the insignificant phrase, *it is one difficulty more?* The buzzing fly would be less ridiculous, if, capable of perceiving the order and magnificence of a palace, it asserted, that the architect never existed.

Every thing indicates, that, according to our different degrees of sense and knowledge, what is simple, and what is easy, have a very different application. We may continually observe, that these expressions are not interpreted in the same manner, by a man

of moderate abilities and a man of genius. However, the distance, which separates the various degrees of intelligence, with which we are acquainted, is probably very trifling in the universal scale of beings. All our reflexions would lead us then to presume, that beyond the limits of the human mind, the simple is our compounded, the easy our wonderful, and the evident our inconceivable.

After having examined the principal arguments of the partisans of atheistical systems, which we now attack ; let us change the scene, and, in the midst of the labyrinth, in which we are placed, try to find a clue for our meditations.

We are witnesses of the existence of the world, and intimately acquainted with our own : thus, either God or matter must have been eternal ; and by a natural consequence, an eternal existence, which is an idea the most incomprehensible, is, however, the most incontestible truth. Obligated now, in order to fix our opinion, to choose between two eternal existences, the one intelligent and free, the other blind and void of all consciousness, why not prefer the first ? An eternal existence is an idea so astonishing, so much above our comprehension, that we decorate it with every thing sublime and beautiful ; and nothing deserves more these decorations than thought.

Would it not be strange, that, in our systematic divisions, it was only to thought, and consequently to all that was most admirable in our nature, that we refuse eternity, while we grant it to matter and its blind combinations ? What a subversion of all proportion ! that we should believe in the eternal existence of matter, because it is present to our eyes, and yet not admit the eternal existence of an intelligence ; while that, which we are endowed with, becomes the source of our judgment, and even the guide of our senses !

And by what other singularity we should grant the faculty and the consciousness of intelligence, only to that small part of the world which is represented by animated beings? Thus, the whole of nature would be below a part; and if no spirit animated the universe, man would appear to have reached his ultimate perfection; though we see in him but a faint sketch, a weak shadow of something more complete and admirable. We perceive that he is, to speak thus, at the commencement of thinking: and all his cares, all his efforts, to extend the empire of that faculty, only inform him, that he tends continually towards an end, from which he is always distant. In short, in his greatest exertions, he feels his weakness. He studies, but he cannot know himself. He makes a few petty discoveries, sees some trifling wheels, while the main spring escapes his search. He is fallen into the world, like a grain of sand thrown by the winds. He has neither a consciousness of his origin, nor a foresight of his end. We perceive in him all the timidity and mistrust of a dependent being. He is constrained, by instinct, to raise to heaven his wishes and contemplations: and, when he is not led astray by an intoxicating reason, he fears, seeks to adore a God, and rejects with disdain the rank which audacious philosophers assign him in the order of nature.

I must also add, that the sentiment of admiration, which I cannot stifle, when I turn my attention on the spiritual qualities we are endowed with, would be insensibly weakened, if I were reduced to consider man himself as a simple growth of blind matter; for the most astonishing production would only inspire me with a transitory emotion, unless I can refer it to an intelligent cause. I must discover a de-

sign, a combination, before I admire; as I have need to perceive feeling and affection, before I love.

But as soon as I see in the human mind the stamp of Omnipotence—and it appears to me one of the results of a grand thought—it reassumes its dignity; and all the faculties of my soul are prostrate before such a wonderful conception.

It is then united with the idea of a God, that the spiritual faculties of man attract my homage and captivate my imagination. In reflecting on these sublime faculties, studying their admirable essence, I am confirmed in the opinion, that there exists a sovereign intelligence, soul of nature, and that nature itself is subject to its laws. Yes, we find in the mind of man the first evidence, a faint shadow of the perfection which we must attribute to the Creator of the universe. What a wonder, indeed, is our thinking faculty, capable of so many things, yet ignorant of its own nature! I am equally astonished, by the extent and limits of thinking. An immense space is open to its researches, and at the same time it cannot comprehend the secrets which appear most proximate with it; as the grand motive of action, the principle of intellectual force, ever remains concealed. Man is then informed, every instant, of his grandeur and dependence: and these thoughts must naturally lead to the idea of Omnipotence. There are, in those limits of our knowledge and ignorance, in that confused and conditional light, all the evidence of design; and it seems to me, sometimes, that I hear this command given to the human soul by the God of the universe: "Go admire a portion of my universe, search for happiness, and learn to love me. But do not try to raise the veil, with which I have covered the secret of thy existence. I have composed thy nature of some of the

attributes which constitute my own essence. Thou wouldst be too near me, if I should permit thee to penetrate the mysteries of it. Wait for the moment destined by my wisdom ; till then, thou canst only reach me by reverence and gratitude."

Not only the wonderful faculty of thinking connects us with the universal intelligence ; but all those inconceivable properties, known by the name of liberty, judgment, will, memory, and foresight ; it is, in short, the august and sublime assemblage of all our intellectual faculties. Are we, in fact, after the contemplation of such a grand phenomenon, far from conceiving a God? No, undoubtedly ; we have within us a feeble image of that infinite power we seek to discover. Man is himself a universe, governed by a sovereign : and we are much nearer the Supreme Intelligence, by our nature, than by any notion of the primitive properties of matter ; properties, from which some wish to make the system of the world and its admirable harmony flow.

It seems to me, that our thinking faculty is too slightly treated in the greater number of philosophic systems : and some have been so much afraid of honouring it, that they will not admit it to be a simple and particular principle, when the subject of the question is the immortality of the soul ; nor will they consider it as a universal principle, when they discuss the opinion of the existence of a God.

It is equally singular, that they wish to compose of matter a soul endowed with the most sublime qualities ; and they pretend, at the same time, that the world, in which we see intelligent beings, had not for a contriver and principal any beings of the same nature. This supposition, however, would be as reasonable as the other is weak : but it seems to me, that they like better to attribute order to confusion, than to order itself.

We seek to penetrate the secret of the existence of the universe : and when we reflect on the causes of that vast and magnificent disposition, we can only attribute it to what seems the most marvellous and analogous to such a composition, thought, intention, and will. Why then should we retrench from the formation of the world all those sublime properties? Are we to act sparingly in an hypothesis, in which all the wonders of nature are concentrated? It is by the spiritual faculties with which man is endowed, that he remains master of the earth, that he has subdued the ferocious animals, conquered the elements, and found a shelter from their impetuosity. It is by these faculties, that man has constructed society, given laws to his own passions, and improved all his means of happiness. In short, nothing has ever been done, but by the aid of his mind : and in his speculations on the formation of the world, and on the admirable relations of all the parts of the universe, that which he wishes not to admit, and will dare to reject, is the intelligent powers and action of thinking. It seems like men disputing about the means which have been made use of to erect a pyramid, who name all the instruments, except those that they found at the foot of the edifice.

Habit alone turns our attention from the union of wonders which compose the soul : and it is thus, unfortunately, that admiration, lively light of the mind and feelings, does not afford us any more instruction. We should be very differently affected, if, for the first time, we contemplated the meanest part of this admirable whole ! But even then, in a little time, the strong conviction of the existence of a God, would be worn away, and become what it is at present. But, let me be permitted, in order to render this truth more striking, to have recourse,

for a moment, to fiction. Let us imagine men, as immovable as plants, but endowed with some one of our senses, enjoying the faculty of reflexion, and enabled to communicate their thoughts. I hear these animated trees discourse about the origin of the world, and the first cause of all things. They advance, like us, different hypotheses on the fortuitous movement of atoms, the laws of fate and blind necessity : and among the different arguments, employed by some, to contest the existence of a God, Creator of the universe, that, which makes the greatest impression, is, that it is impossible to conceive how an idea should become a reality ; or how the design of disposing the parts should influence the execution, since the will being a simple wish, a thought without force, has not any means to metamorphose itself into action : but in vain would these immovable spectators of the universe wish to change their situation, to raise a shelter against the impetuosity of the winds, or the scorching heat of the sun : yet then it would be evidently absurd, to imagine the existence of a faculty essentially contrary to the immutable nature of things. Let, however, in the midst of this conversation, a supernatural power appear, and say to them, what would you think, then, if this wonder, whose existence you regard as impossible, should be executed before your eyes ; and if the faculty of acting, according to your own will, were to be suddenly given you ? Seized with astonishment, they would prostrate themselves with fear and respect ; and from that instant, without the slightest doubt, would believe they had discovered the secret of the system of the world : and they would adore the infinite power of intelligence : and it is to a like cause we should attribute the disposition of the universe. However, the same phenomenon which would ap-

pear above belief, and out of the limits of possibility, to those who have never been a witness of it, that wonder exists in our world. We see it, we experience it every instant; though the force of habit weakens the impression, and eradicates our admiration.

The hypothesis I have just mentioned, might even be applied to the sudden acquisition of all the means proper to communicate ideas; and to the prompt discoveries of the other properties of our mind; but several of these properties constitute, in such an essential manner, the essence of the soul, that we cannot, even in imagination, separate them any more than we can detach action from will, and will from thought. There are some spiritual faculties, and those the most wonderful, which we cannot define, and which we should not have even supposed to exist, had we not possessed them: and if it had been possible to have known them before we were endowed with them, the inventors of systems would have pointed out this astonishing means, as the only one applicable to the composition of the admirable harmony of the universe.

We shall be led to the same reflexions, when, ceasing to expatiate on the greatest wonders of our nature, we bound ourselves to consider the human mind at the moment when its action may be perceived. To render this observation more clear, let us follow a man-of genius in the course of his labours; and we shall see him at once embrace a multitude of ideas, compare them, notwithstanding their distance, and form, from such a mixture, a distinct result, proper to direct his public or private conduct. Let us consider him extending and multiplying these first combinations, and connecting them, by an invisible web, to some scattered points, which his imagination has

fixed in the vast regions of futurity. With the assistance of these magic succours, we see him approaching the time which does not yet exist. But we see him in his career, aided by accumulated knowledge, more subtle than the rays of the sun, and yet separated with an admirable order; more fleet and dispersed than the light vapours of the morning, and still subject to the will of that inconceivable power, which, under the name of memory, heaps up the acquisitions of the mind, in order to assist it afterwards in its new acquirements. But let us examine, still further, this man of genius, when he deposits, by means of writing, his different reflexions: and let us ask, how he knows quickly, that an idea is new, and that a style has an original turn? Let us again enquire, how, in order to form such a judgment, he makes with celerity a recapitulation of the thoughts and images employed by others, to illustrate the subjects they have treated, while years and ages were rolling away. In short, let every one, according to his strength, try to penetrate into these mysterious beauties of the human understanding: and let him enquire afterwards about the impression which he receives from a like meditation. There is, perhaps, as great a difference, if I may be allowed to say so, between the most perfect vegetable and the human mind, as between it and the Deity. To extend this idea, we have only to suppose, that, in the immensity which surrounds us, there exists a gradation equal to that we have perceived in the little space we are permitted to inspect.

The author of a celebrated work accuses men of presumption, because, when they endeavour to trace the first principle of things, by comparing their own faculties with it, they seem to think that they approach it. But, what other part should we be able

to take, when we are called to reason and to judge? It is not sufficient, that the idea of a Supreme Being may be metaphysical: it is necessary further, some will argue, that we even try to render it abstract, by removing it out of our imagination, and that we seek for, in our judgment and opinions, a support which may be in a manner absent from ourselves, and absolutely foreign to our nature. All this cannot be understood. We confess that we have not sufficient strength to know the essence and perfection of God: but, giving way to abstraction, we extinguish our natural light, and deprive ourselves of the few means we have to obtain this knowledge. We can only be acquainted with unknown things by the help of those we know: we shall be led astray, if we be obliged to take another road; and modern philosophers often seek to attack intimate sentiments by arbitrary ideas, of which an imagination the most capricious is the only foundation.

It will then always be surprising, that, in our contemplations and habits of thinking, the wisdom of the design, the harmony of the whole, and the perfection of parts, are manifest traces of intelligence: and yet that we should renounce, suddenly, this manner of feeling and judging, in order to attribute the formation of the universe to the effect of chance, or the eternal laws of blind necessity: and is it possible, that we can deduce the same consequences from an admirable order, as from wild confusion? Facts so different, principles so contrary, should not lead to the same conclusion. The magnificent system of the universe ought to have some weight, when we conjecture about its origin: and it would be difficult to persuade us, that in investigating the most exalted truths, we ought to consider all the knowledge we acquire by the view of nature, as

merely indifferent. Men are carried very far, when they reject the arguments drawn from final causes. It is not only a single thought they would destroy ; it is the source of all our knowledge they would dry up.

Men insensibly cease to perceive a connexion between the existence of a God, and the different miracles with which we are surrounded. But all would be changed, if God exhibited the numerous acts of his power successively, instead of displaying them all at once. Our imagination, animated by such a movement, would rise to the idea of a Supreme Being. It is then, because an accumulation of wonders aggrandizes the universe—it is because a harmony, not to be equalled, seems to convert an infinity of parts into an admirable whole—and that profound wisdom maintains it in an immutable equilibrium—it is, in short, because insensible gradations and delicate shades render still more perfect the wonders of nature, that men are less struck with astonishment, or lost in adoration.

We want, say you, new phenomena to determine our persuasion. Do you forget, that all, which is offered to our view, already surpasses our understanding? If the least miracle was to be effected before you, you would be ready to bend your proud reason. But because the most grand and wonderful, which the imagination itself can form an idea of, has preceded your existence, you receive no impression from it ; all appears simple to you, all necessary. But the reality of the wonders of the universe has nothing to do with the instant you are allowed to contemplate them ; your pilgrimage on earth, is it not a period imperceptible, in the midst of eternity? Admiration, surprize, and all the affections of which man is susceptible, do not change the nature of the phe-

nomena which surround him : and his intelligence reflects but a very small part of the wonders of the universe.

We have no need of a revolution in the order of nature, to discover the power of its Author. The fibres of a blade of grass confound our intelligence : and when we have grown old in study and observation, we continually discover new objects, which we have not investigated, and perceive new relations : we are ever in the midst of unknown things and incomprehensible secrets.

However, supposing, for a moment, the existence of extraordinary miracles which we should be impressed with ; it is easy to conceive, that these miracles would not have on men the influence we presume ; for if they were frequent, and if they happened only at regular periods, their first impression would slowly be weakened : and at last, men would range them in the class of the successive movements of eternal matter. But if, on the contrary, there were a long interval between these miracles, the generations, which succeed the actual witnesses of them, would accuse their ancestors of credulity, or contest the truth of those traditions, which transmitted the account of a revolution contrary to the common course of nature.

Some may still say, that in order to render manifest the existence of the Supreme Being, it would be necessary, that men were punctually answered, when they address their prayers. But the influence of our wishes upon events, if this influence were habitual and general, would it be sufficient to change the opinion of those who see, with indifference, that innumerable multitude of actions which are so miraculously subject to our will ? Would they not still find some reason for considering such an increase of power, as the necessary result of the eternal system of the

universe? Thus, whatever might be the measure of intelligence, added to that we now enjoy—in short, though a number of new wonders were accumulated—men could still oppose to that union of miracles the same objections, and the same doubts they do not now fear to raise against the wonders we are daily witnesses of. It is difficult, it is impossible, to make a constant or profound impression on men who are only susceptible of astonishment in the short transition from the known to the unknown. They have but a moment to feel this emotion, and it is from the slowness of their comprehension, or the continual succession of the phenomena submitted to their inspection, that the duration of their admiration depends. And perhaps, our faculties and powers would excite more surprise, if, in order to subject our movements to our will, it were necessary to give our orders, and to pronounce them with a loud voice, as a captain does to his soldiers. However, such a constitution would be a degree less wonderful than that we possess.

I will anticipate another objection. We advance gradually, some will say, in discovering the secrets of nature. The power of attraction, that grand physical faculty, has only been known about a century: and observations on the effects of electricity are still more recent. Every age, every year, adds to the treasure of our knowledge: and the time will arrive, perhaps, when, without having recourse to any mysterious opinions, we shall have explained all the phenomena which still astonish us.

It is not at first conceivable, how our past discoveries, and all those which may in future enrich the human mind, would ever free us from the necessity of placing a first cause at the termination of our reflexions; for the more we perceive of new links in

the vast disposition of the universe, the more we extend the magnificence of the work, and the power of the Creator. A series of successful exertions may reveal, perhaps, the secret of some physical properties, superior in force to those we have experienced: but, even then, all the movements of nature would be subordinate to a few general laws: and when we should distinguish these laws, the result of our researches will demonstrate simply the existence of a greater unity in the system of the world; and this character of perfection would be impressed, if it were possible, still more on us: for in a work, such as the universe, it is the simple and regular relations which announce, above all, the wisdom and power of the Disposer; because our admiration could never be excited by an assemblage of incoherent ideas, whose chain would every instant be broken. But, I know not by what habit or blindness it is, that when men have discovered a principle uniform in its action, and have given to that principle a denomination, they believe that their astonishment ought to cease. In fact, attraction and electricity are not so much now subjects of surprise, as a means to free us from the admiration due to the magnificent result of those singular properties. In short we are habituated to consider, with indifference, every general effect, of which we acquire a conception; as if even this conception were not one of the most noble of the phenomena of nature. Some will say, that men, by degrees, becoming familiarized with their own minds, despise all they can easily understand. Their competitions are then the only origin of their vanity; for when they examine themselves individually, or when they judge of men in general, they have such a mean opinion of themselves, that they do not highly value their discoveries.

We ought to place, among the number of ideas the most extensive and general, that of Buffon on the formation of the earth. But this idea, supposing it as just as it is beautiful, only explains to us one of the gradations of this superb work. I see the earth formed by an emanation of the sun; I see it animated and become fertile, when it has received, by slow degree, its temperature; and I see, beside, issue out of its lap all the beauties of nature—and that which surprises me still more, all the beings endowed with instinct or intelligence. But if the elements of these incomprehensible productions had been prepared or simply disposed in the fiery body which animates our system, I transfer to it my astonishment, and equally have to seek for the Author of so many wonders.

I must now fix my attention, for a few moments, on the most metaphysical part of this work. We can, perhaps, form an idea of a world existing without a beginning, and by the laws of blind necessity, provided that world was immovable and invariable in all its parts; but how apply the idea of eternity to a continual succession? As such a nature is necessarily composed of a beginning and end, we cannot otherwise define the idea of succession. Thus we are constrained to elevate ourselves to a first Being existing by himself, when we have before our eyes a constant revolution of causes and effects, of destruction and life. It is impossible to have any idea of motion without that of a beginning.

The difficulty would not be removed, by saying, that the whole of the universe is immutable, and the parts only subject to change; for a whole of this kind, without any relation whatever, either real or imaginary, a like whole has only an ideal circumscription, which, in fact, is not susceptible of an alteration. But such a circumscription only presents us

an assemblage of positive things contained in its circle : and it is not in studying those, nor in examining the different parts of the unknown whole, which we call the universe, that we are allowed to draw consequences, or to form a judgment. Thus, seeing only a succession, we rationally feel the necessity of a first cause.

But, some will say, you are entangled in the same difficulty, when you suppose the eternity of a God ; for a series of designs in an intelligent being should lead to the idea of a commencement, as well as the successions of the physical world.

This proposition, undoubtedly, is not easily cleared up, like all those whose solution appears to be united to the knowledge of infinity. We cannot, however, hinder ourselves from perceiving, that the physical generations lead us, in a manner simple and manifest, to the necessity of a first principle : and we ought to search for this principle out of ourselves, since our nature does not furnish any idea of it ; whereas the successive combinations of the mind may relate to an origin, of which we have not any conception, and which seems united, in some manner, to these same combinations. In fact, we can easily form a distinct idea of a faculty of thought, antecedent to the action of thinking, and which might even be separated by such intervals as the imagination could conceive. It is the same with liberty, that intellectual power of which we have the consciousness, at the same time that it remains absolutely idle.

I shall add, that, even in the narrow circle of our thoughts, it is true, the operations of the mind appear to us often dependent on each other. Yet, some times their chain is so broken, that our ideas seem really to issue out of nothing ; instead of which, in

every other production, we know, there is always a visible tie between that which is, and that which was. We must not forget, that at the very time our ideas appear to us connected, that succession is to be attributed to our weakness and ignorance, rather than to the mind considered in a general manner. Circumscribed in all our means, we are obliged to go continually from the known to the unknown, from probability to certainty, from experience of the past, to conjectures about the future. But this gradation, this course, ought to be absolutely foreign to an intelligence without bounds, which knows and which sees all at the same time: and perhaps we are in the way of this truth, when we perceive among us, the claim of true genius, and the turbulent whirlpool of folly.

In short, it is not men persuaded of the existence of a God, that we need require to transport themselves beyond, if I may say so, the domain of thought, in order to search for proofs of their opinion: atheists alone want such an effort; since they alone resist the influence of the simplest sentiments and most natural arguments; since they alone bid us mistrust that distinct connexion which we perceive between the Supreme Intelligence and the perfection of order; that train of causes and effects, between the idea of a God and all the propensities of the soul. It is these considerations, intelligible to all, which give new force to our opinions.

Directed by these reflexions, and wishing to investigate in a useful manner the subject I have undertaken, I shall not engage in the arguments which turn on the creation of the world. It is sufficient for me to have perceived, that the idea of the creation of the universe is not more inconceivable than the idea of its eternity. I am not, indeed, obliged,

with those who adopt the last system, to suppose something growing out of nothing. But substituting the idea of an eternal existence, instead of that of nothing, is a thought which equally terrifies my imagination; for my mind knows not where to place that eternity, and, in order to comprehend it, still surrounds it with a vacuum. In the system of a created universe, I see something coming out of nothing, by the will of a Being whom I can form an idea of. But in the system of the eternity of matter, my faculties are absorbed in endeavouring to embrace it. In short, both of these modes of existence appear to me in the midst of a vague infinity, which no human power can conceive; and if sometimes the eternal existence of the universe seem less incomprehensible than its creation, it is only because such an idea eludes examination, and precludes reasoning.

The idea of a Creator is undoubtedly equally above our comprehension; but we are led to it by all our feelings and thoughts: and if we be stopped in the efforts which we make to reach the cause we seek, it is by obstacles which we can even attribute to the will of that power we are searching to discover. Instead of that, contemplating the uniform and insipid rotation of an eternal existence, we are almost driven to despair; that is to say, we feel the impossibility of conceiving the nature of things, and the certainty, nevertheless, that there exists not any veil designedly placed between that nature and our understandings.

I must still make some further observations. We see a resemblance of creation in the continual reproduction of all the bounties of the earth: and our moral system offers a still more striking one, in the formation of ideas which did not exist antecedently. Our feelings appear another proof of the same truth;

for they have not any evident connexion with the cause that we assign them : thus, without habit, we might see as great a difference between certain exterior emotions and the various affections of our souls, as we can conceive between the existence of the world and the idea of a Creator.

We perceive, also, that the universe has all the characters of a production ; characters which consist in the union of a multitude of parts, whose relations are fixed by a single thought. In short, even the succession of time announces intelligence ; for we know not how to place that succession in the midst of an eternal existence. We cannot conceive any different periods in an extent in which there is not a beginning ; for before we arrive at any of these periods, there must have been always an infinite space ; besides, there being no beginning, considered abstractedly, annihilates the idea of intervals, since they could not have two fixed points. Thus, the introduction of the past, the present, and the future, into the midst of eternity, seems due to an intelligent power, who has modelled this immense uniformity, and governs the nature of things.

I ought not to dwell long on these reflexions. To give a basis to religious opinions, it is not necessary to conceive of creation in its metaphysical essence ; it is sufficient, to believe the existence of a Supreme Being, Creator and Preserver of nature, the model of wisdom and goodness, the Protector of rational beings, whose providence governs the world. We lose all our strength, when, extending too far our meditations, we aspire to know and explain the secrets of infinity. We then only exhibit to the adversaries of religion the faint stretch of our opinions, and the last struggles of a reason weakened by its own efforts. It is much better to use those arguments which sense

and feeling are able to defend. We should candidly confess, that our noblest faculties have immutable limits; one degree more would perhaps diffuse a sudden light on the questions, whose examination disconcerts us. There is not, perhaps, any mind accustomed to meditation, which has not had several times presentiments of this truth; for the first glimmering of a new perception seems to out-run thinking; and such is its proximity, that we imagine one step more would enable us to catch it. But our hope is dissipated, we cannot grasp the fleeting shadow, and fall back again into the sad conviction of our impotence. Alas! in that infinite space, which our intellectual powers try to run over, there are only immense deserts, where the mind cannot find repose, or the thoughts meet any asylum. These are the regions whose entrance seems to have been desolated, in order that the most unbounded imagination might not obtain any knowledge of them. But will you dare to say, that there stops all intelligence, there finish the mysteries of nature? Would you expect to possess the secrets of time in attributing an eternal existence to all we know? Certainly, we are too insignificant to promulge such decrees; we enjoy too small a portion of eternity to determine what belongs to it.

The most probable thought is, that our reason is insufficient to reach the explanations we wish to unfold. The chain of beings above us every instant reminds us of this truth: and it appears singular, that, perceiving so distinctly the bounds of our senses, we should not be induced to think, that our intelligence, apparently so extended, may nevertheless run over a very circumscribed space. Our imagination goes much farther than our knowledge; but its domain is perhaps only a point in what is yet unexplored: and it is necessary to penetrate those unknown regions, to

discover the truths which illustrate the mysteries that surround us : but there is a Being who knows them : Omniscience is at the summit of those gradations of intelligence which we trace. We know nothing, we do not discover any result, but through the assistance of experience and observation : and we only know the world by the little front scene which meets our view. Is it rational to suppose, that only this kind of knowledge exists in the universe ? Men, in the slow progress of their judgment, resemble children ; but even this condition recalls the idea of a father and a tutor. Every thing, however, shows us, that the phenomena of nature relate to a grand whole. We see that its dispersed productions are united to some general cause. It is the same with human knowledge : more admirable than the rays of light spread through immensity, it is an emanation from the most perfect light. In short, if space, if time itself, those two existences without bounds, be subject to division, why should we not be induced to think, that the degrees of knowledge we experience and conceive, are also only a part of an universal intelligence ?

Of all the objections against the idea of a God, the weakest, in my opinion, is that drawn from the mixture of troubles and pleasures to which human life is exposed. A God, some will say, ought to unite every perfection : and we cannot believe in his existence, when we perceive limits in his power or goodness.

This is a flimsy argument ; for if men do not admit as a proof of the existence of a God, all that we discover of wisdom, harmony, and intelligence in the universe, what right have they to use an apparent contrast between sovereign power and goodness, in order to attribute the formation of the world to chance ? Would it be just, that the defects of a work

should be brought as a proof against the existence of a workman, while the beauty of the same work was not allowed to support a contrary opinion? We should reason in a different manner. Disorder and imperfection merely point out to us a negation of certain qualities. We must in general terms, throw an odium on the whole, in order to banish the idea of an intelligent hand; whereas, to strengthen the other opinion, it is sufficient that particular parts announce art and genius. Thus, when we enter a palace, if we there find distinct marks of talents, we attribute its erection to an architect, even though in a part of the edifice we should not distinguish any traces of invention.

I have already had occasion to show how we are led to these incomprehensible extremes, when we endeavour exactly to proportion the wisdom and power of an Infinite Being: and I shall not again dwell on this argument, nor repeat, that from any imaginable hypothesis, we might draw this deduction, that Omnipotence could have produced more happiness.

There are ideas which appear contrary to reason, only, because we cannot perceive them in one point of view: and we discover this truth, not only in considering things which are foreign to our nature, but when we turn our attention on the events which come daily under our inspection. Why do we then suppose, that we can comprehend the most grand and noble thoughts? Is it consistent with the idea of an Infinite Power, that we refuse to credit the existence of infinite goodness? Is it consistent with the idea of Infinite Wisdom, that we will not admit the existence of Omnipotence? Nay more; is it consistent with the idea of infinite chances, that we imagine the absurd systems concerning the formation of the

world? We use infinity for every thing, except to place above us an intelligence, whose properties and essence our reason cannot determine.

We are lost in a boundless uncertainty, when we try to go beyond the limits of human powers. Thus, after having collected all the forces of our souls, to enable us to penetrate the existence of a God, we ought not to exhaust ourselves in subtleties, vainly endeavouring to conceive, in a just acceptation, and under evident relations, various attributes of an Infinite Being, who has chosen to make himself known to us in a certain measure, and under certain forms: and it is too much to require of the worshippers of God, to defend themselves against those who contest his existence, and dispute about the nature of his perfections. I am far from supposing any obstacle to the execution of his will: but I should be full of the same religious sentiments, if I knew that there existed order and laws in the nature of things, which the Divine Power has a faculty of modifying, and that it cannot entirely destroy. I should not less adore the Supreme Being, if, at the same time, that his various attributes were in constant union, it were, nevertheless, by degrees, that he produced happiness. I should silently respect the secrets which would escape my penetration, and wait with respectful submission, till the clouds were dissipated which still surround me. What then! always in ignorance and obscurity? Yes, always: such is the condition of men, when they wish to go beyond the limits traced by the immutable laws of nature. But the grand truths, which we can easily perceive, are sufficient to regulate our conduct, and afford us comfort. That there is a God, every thing indicates and loudly announces: but I cannot discover either the mysteries of his essence, or the intimate connexion of his various per-

sections. I plainly see in a crowd the monarch encircled by his guards ; I know his laws. I enjoy the order he has prescribed : but I assist not at his councils, and am a stranger to his deliberations. I even perceive, that an impenetrable veil separates me from the designs of the Supreme Being ; and I do not undertake to trace them. I commit myself with confidence to the protection of that Being, whom I believe good and great ; as I would rely on the guidance of a friend during a dark night : and while I have my foot in the abyss, I will depend on him to snatch me from the danger, and calm my terrors.

If we might be allowed the comparison, we should say, that God is like the sun, which we cannot steadfastly gaze at : but throwing our eyes down, we perceive its rays, and the beauties it spreads around. However, men, who, either through a mistrust of their understanding, or the nature of it, have only by their reverence an intercourse with God, feel most forcibly the impression of his grandeur ; as it is at the extremity of the lever, that we strongly experience its power.

We consider the general assent of nations and ages, in the opinion of the existence of a God, as a remarkable presumption in favour of that opinion. But such a proof would lose part of its force, if we, in time, regarded as a kind of moral phenomenon the relation which all men may have with an idea so sublime, notwithstanding the visible disparity which exists between their different degrees of understanding and knowledge : and this observation should lead to a thought, that, in the midst of the clouds, which obscure the idea of a God, sensibility becomes our best guide. It seems the most innate part of ourselves, and in this respect to communicate, in the most intimate manner, with the Author of our nature.

The sight advances before our other senses ; the imagination goes beyond it : but as it is obliged to trace its own path, sensibility, which bounds over all, goes still further.

The reasoner, in his efforts to attain to profound metaphysical truths, forms a chain whose links rather follow each other, than are joined. The mind of man not being sufficiently subtle and extended, cannot always unite exactly that infinite multitude of ideas which crowd at the determination of our meditations. Sensibility is then the best calculated to conceive the sublime truth, which, not being composed of parts, is not susceptible of section, and can only be comprehended in its unity. Thus, while the mind often wanders in vain speculations, and loses itself in metaphysical labyrinths, the idea of a Supreme Being is impressed, without effort, in a simple heart, which is still under the influence of nature. Thus, the man of feeling, as well as the intelligent man, announces a Supreme Being, whom we cannot discover, without loving : and this union of all the faculties of the soul towards the same idea—this emotion, which resembles a kind of instinct—ought to be connected with a first cause ; as there is for every thing a first model.

It is, perhaps, also, the confused sentiment of that first model, which leads us to religion, when we see a virtuous man. Men, with their fatal systems, would alter and annihilate every thing : but the comfortable hopes and thoughts which arise from a profound and rational admiration, will still resist that destruction. They vainly wish to make us consider such a sentiment as the simple play of blind matter ; while all within us seems to invite us to search for a more noble origin. And how can we avoid seeing, in these great qualities of men, nobleness of soul, ele-

vation of genius, expansion of heart, love of order, and interesting goodness—how avoid seeing, in this rich picture, the reflexion of a celestial light, and concluding from it, that there is somewhere a first intelligence? Do rays exist without a centre of light? I know not, but hurried away by these reflexions, I sometimes think, innate goodness, which we admire as the first rank in the scale of intelligent beings, in a more immediate manner, leads to the knowledge of the Author of nature: and when this innate morality is found united in some persons with a presentiment of the Divine nature, there is, in this agreement, a charm which impresses us—a kind of unknown character, which attracts our respect: as every tender and sublime thought is roused by the idea which we form of the souls of Socrates and Fenelon.

At the same time, actuated by similar sentiments, we experience a painful emotion, when we are informed, that there exist men, enemies to all these ideas; men, who had rather debase themselves and humanity, by attributing their origin to chance, than resolve to consider the spiritual faculties, which they enjoy, as a faint sketch of the sovereign intelligence. Thus, instead of employing their minds to lend some force to these comfortable truths, or, at least, probabilities so dear, they, on the contrary, dispute their reality, and seek to embarrass by sophistry, the doctrines which tend to fortify the first dispositions of our nature. We see the materialists, rather than elevate themselves, drag us with them from happiness and hope. They only grant eternity to the dust, out of which, they say, we sprung. What honour, however, can they derive from those more enlightened views which they boast of, if they be only the result of a growth similar to that of plants; and if our spiritual faculties, so far from being lost, in some mea-

sure in the infinite intelligence—so far from being united to a grand destiny, be only associated to this frail structure, which is every day, every hour, exposed to various dangers? What credit should we derive from these faculties, if they only enabled us to describe, with precision, the almost imperceptible circle of time, in which we live and die—if they only served to raise us above our equals during that short moment of life, which is hastening to lose itself in endless ages, as a light vapour in the immensity of air? how can you speak with delight of fame and promotion, when you voluntarily renounce the grandeur arising from the most noble origin? You are proud of the celebrity of your country, the renown of your families: and the only glory you desire not to partake, is that which ennobles the whole human race!

In short, I would ask, by what strange error of the imagination it is, that in meditating on the existence of a God, men do not go further than to doubt it; since to support, to guide our judgment, we have only an understanding whose weakness we continually experience; since it is capable of gradual improvement, as knowledge is perpetually accumulating? There exists not any proportion between the measure of our knowledge and the unbounded extent which is displayed before us; there is not any between the union of all our powers and the profound mysteries of nature. How then shall we dare to say, that men are arrived at the pinnacle of knowledge, and that, in the endless ages to come, there will never break forth a more penetrating faculty than our weak reason?

However, were men even to lose the hope of advancing one step in metaphysical researches, and to persist in declaring insufficient and imperfect the various proofs of the existence of a God; it is not to be con-

tested, that all other systems are surrounded with still greater obscurity; and they would only have a doubt as the result of their reasoning. But have they ever reflected on the influence a simple doubt has, when that doubt is applied to an idea, whose relations are without bounds? Let us try to represent an equal probability in a circumstance which only concerns the interests of this transitory life: and we shall soon see what force the same degree of probability would have in the immensurable relations of the finite to the infinite. Thus, not only an uncertainty, but the slightest presumption of the existence of a God, would, in the estimation of sound reason, be a sufficient foundation for religion and morality. Yes, we might thus humbly pray, though depressed by doubt: "O thou God, who art unknown! sovereign goodness, whose image is stamped on our hearts—if thou exist, if thou be Lord of this magnificent universe—deign to accept our love and humble homage."

Undoubtedly, these thoughts are sufficient to inspire with respect and fear, beings ignorant of their origin; who have so little to sacrifice and so much to desire; who, on account of their extreme weakness, cannot relinquish some hopes, and must attach themselves to a fixed and predominant idea, which may serve as an anchor in the midst of the inconsistencies and agitations of their minds.

It is, perhaps, because the time when every thing will be explained, is still far distant, that many exaggerate their doubts, and often confound them with a decided incredulity. I form to my imagination, a solemn period, when the inhabitants of the earth will be instructed in the mysteries of their nature and the secrets of futurity; and that some signal phenomenon will mark the awful day proper to fix our attention: and I am intimately persuaded, that, in such

a moment, the men most indifferent about religion will appear dismayed, and even recognise, that what they took for conviction, was but a wavering opinion, only supported by self-love and a desire of distinction.

At the same time that I form this judgment of the pretended incredulity of several persons, I will venture a reflexion of a different kind : It is, that superficial faith in the existence of God; and the opinions which depend on it, is not equivalent, in effect, to doubt retained in proper bounds : and perhaps, if these bounds were determined, the belief of one class of society would be less wavering.

I anticipate another objection. Those doubts, some may say, those doubts which so many men cannot smother, are they not an argument against the existence of a God? For a powerful Being, such as we suppose him, could have inspired a general confidence in that noble truth : he needed not to have recourse to supernatural means ; his will was sufficient. I confess, that we can easily add, in imagination, several degrees to our knowledge and happiness ; but that condition of our nature, of which the cause is unknown, can never be contrary to the idea of the existence of a God. All is limited in our physical properties and in our moral faculties ; but within these confines we see the work of a Supreme Intelligence : and we discover, every instant, the traces of a divine hand, sufficiently obvious to direct our opinions. Unstable reasoning, concerning what we should be, can never weaken the distinct consequences which arise from what we are.

When the Laplander, in his cave, hears by chance the distant echo of thunder, he says, that *God still lives on the high mountain* ; and is it in the very bosom of munificent blessings, with the light of philo-

sophy, that men would wish to reject the idea of the existence of a Supreme Being? What an abuse of reason! Infinity ought to overwhelm the most vigorous and enlightened understanding, make the wise man timid in his judgment, and inform him what he is. Can man do better than give way to the admiration the view of so many incomprehensible wonders must necessarily inspire, and with fervour seize that chain of miracles, which seems to promise to lead to the knowledge of the Creator of them? Can he be more nobly employed, than in tracing an opinion, not only the most probable, but the most grand and interesting? Alas! if we should ever lose it—the idea is not to be endured. Clouds and thick darkness would overwhelm the feelings which seem to dart before our reason, to explore the unknown country we pant after; and a melancholy and eternal silence would appear to surround all nature. We should call for a comforter, implore protection—but where is it to be found? We should search for hope—but it is forever fled—Alas! this is not all. A terrific thought strikes me. I hesitate a moment to communicate it; yet, it seems to me, that we lend new force to religious opinions, when we demonstrate, by various ways, that the principles which destroy those opinions, lead to a result contrary to our nature. I will then conclude this chapter by a reflexion of serious importance.

If there be not a God—if this world and the whole universe were only the production of chance or nature itself subsisting from all eternity—and if this nature, void of consciousness, had not any guide or superior—in short, if all its movements were the necessary effect of a property ever concealed in its essence—a terrible thought would alarm our imagination: we should not only renounce the hopes

which enliven life : we should not only see continually advancing towards us the image of death and annihilation : these dreadful anticipations would not be all---an uncertain cause of fear would trouble the mind. In fact, the revolutions of a blind nature being more obscure than the designs of an Intelligent Being, it would be impossible to discover on what base, in the universe, reposed the destiny of men ; impossible to foresee whether, by some one of the laws of that imperious nature, intelligent beings are devoted to perish irrevocably, or revive under some other form ; if they be to stumble on new pleasures, or suffer eternally. Life and death, happiness and misery, may belong indifferently to a nature whose movements are not directed by any intelligence, are not connected by any moral idea, but solely dependent on a blind property, which is represented by that terrible and inexplicable word, *necessity*. A like nature would resemble the rocks to which Prometheus was bound, that were equally insensible to the agonizing groans of the wretch, and to the joy of the vultures who preyed on his vitals.

Thus, in a like system, nothing would be able to fix our opinion with respect to futurity, and guard the sensible part of ourselves from yielding to some unknown force : in short, can we reply without trembling ? nothing—and of course, eternal torments might accidentally become our portion.

The momentary experience of life might, perhaps, inspire us with a kind of tranquillity ; but what is that in immensity, but calculations founded on the observance of a short interval ? What is that hope which only a fleeting moment gives weight to ? It is as if the fluttering insect, which lives but a day, should consider itself as a representation of the

eternal condition of the universe. The mixture of pains and pleasures, to which men are subject on earth, is not a certain proof of what may happen in other times and places; for unity, equality, and analogy, all those sources of probability and principle to judge from, are connected with general ideas of order and harmony, but those ideas are not applicable to a nature subject to necessity.

We have some difficulty to assure ourselves of the designs of a Supreme Being. However by a kind of analogy we shall be able to form an idea of the divine will: and our minds, our feelings, and virtues, all aid us in the search. But were we sprung from an insensible nature, we should not have any connexion with the different parts of its immense extent; and the attentive study of our moral constitution would not throw a light on the various revolutions of which the material world is susceptible. We should only discover, that there would be much less reason to oppose, in imagination, limits to the varied movements of a nature without a guide, than to circumscribe, in some manner, the actions of an Omnipotent Being, whose other attributes are also infinite; for the ideas of order, justice, and goodness, which arise from a knowledge of his perfections, seem to trace a circle in the midst of infinity, which the mind of man may perceive. Yes, these ideas subject a great space to our contemplations: but what advantage is there in trying to be acquainted with the mysteries of an insensible nature, or to penetrate the secret of the motion impressed by blind necessity?

Let me repeat it, then, as a termination to these reflexions; all would be obscure, all mere chance in the fate of man, if we did not attribute the disposition and preservation of the world to the omni-

tent will of an Intelligent Being, whose perfections our feelings and thoughts faintly represent.

In short, even though in the system of the eternity of nature, men were assured that death destroys individuality, and were they even able to drive away the idea of the continuation or renewal of it, by any sentiment or remembrance ; would it be evident, that we should be absolutely indifferent about the torments, rational beings may endure in that space which is represented by the idea of infinity and eternity ? The metaphysical idea, which determines us to place our consciousness on that imperceptible and mysterious point---which unites our present thoughts to the past, and our actual sentiments to our hopes and fears---this thought is not sufficient to make us regardless of our fate, or render us indifferent to the unknown effects which may result from the revolutions of a nature, which we are not acquainted with. The anxieties and troubles of the beings who are to live in the ages yet unborn, do not interest us as belonging to any particular person ; however, we have, for those abstract misfortunes, in this instance, a sympathy which escapes reasoning.

I agree, that in the system of undirected nature, happiness or misery, transitory or without end, have the same degree of probability : but what a terrifying resemblance ! Can we, undismayed, consider such a chance ?

How happens it then, that some pretend, that atheism frees us from every kind of terror about futurity ? I cannot perceive, that such a conclusion flows from this fatal system. A God, such as my heart delineates, encourages and moderates all my feelings. I say to myself, " He is good and indulgent : he knows our weakness ; he loves to produce happiness : and I see the advances of death without

terror, and often with hope." But every fear would become reasonable, if I lived under the dominion of an insensible nature, whose laws and revolutions are unknown. I seek for some means to escape from its power—but even death cannot afford me a retreat, or space an asylum. I reflect, if it be possible, to find compassion and goodness; but here is no prime intelligence, no first cause; a blind nature surrounds us, and governs imperiously. I in vain demand, what is to be done with me? it is deaf to my voice. Devoid of will, thought, and feeling, it is governed by an irresistible force, whose motion is a mystery never to be unfolded. What a view for the human mind, to anticipate the destruction of all our primitive ideas of order, justice, and goodness! Shall I further say, even though, in every system, the entrance of the future were unknown, I should be less unhappy and forlorn, if it were to a father, a benefactor, that I committed the deposit of life which I held from him. This last communication with the Master of the world, would mitigate my pains: my eyes, when closing, would perceive his power; that I should not lose all, I might still hope that God remained with those I loved, and find some comfort in the thought, that my destiny was united to his will; that my existence and the employments I devoted myself to, formed one of the indelible points of his eternal remembrance; and that the incomprehensible darkness I was going to plunge into, is equally a part of his empire. But when a feeling and elevated soul, which sometimes enjoys a sentiment of its own grandeur, should certainly know, that, dragged by a blind motion, it was going to be dissipated, to be scattered in that dreary waste, where all that is most vile on earth is indifferently precipitated; such a thought

would blight the noblest actions, and be a continual source of sadness and despondency. Save us from these dreadful reflexions, sublime and cherished belief of a God ! afford us the courage and comfort we need, and guard our minds, as from fatal phantoms, from all those vain suppositions, those errors of reasoning and metaphysical subtleties, which interpose between man and his Creator ! And we, full of confidence in the first lesson of nature, will take for a guide that interior sentiment, which is not thought, but something more ; which neither reasons nor conjectures ; but perhaps forms the closest connexion and most certain communication with those grand truths, which the understanding alone can never reach.

FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

On the respect that is due to religion from true philosophy.

THE view of the universe, the reflexions of our minds, and the inclinations of our hearts, all concur to strengthen the thought, that there exists a God : and without power to comprehend this Infinite Being, to form a just idea of his essence and perfections, the confused sentiment of his grandeur, and the continual experience of their own weakness, are so many imperious motives, which, in all ages and countries, have impelled men to worship a God. Those natural ideas have acquired new force by the light of revelation : but it is not in a metaphysical work, that the authenticity of the Christian religion ought to be discussed : nor could we add much to the doctrines contained in books

composed at different periods on this important subject. All discussions, which are allied to truths, whose authenticity depends on facts, are necessarily confined within certain bounds: and we are obliged to pursue a beaten track, and run over the same circle, when we enter on such a well-known subject. I shall then confine myself to some reflexions, and make choice of those which are best adapted to the particular genius of the present age, and the modifications which our sentiments receive from predominant opinions; for our judgments, like our impressions, vary with the change which happens insensibly in habits and manners. One age is that of intolerance and bigotry; another of relaxation and indifference, or a contempt of all ancient customs. Every century, every generation is distinguished by a general character—a character which we take sometimes for new ideas; while it is nothing but the natural effect of exaggeration in our preceding opinions. Men are subject to moral laws, similar in several respects to mechanical rules: and with all their knowledge and pride, they remind us of those children, who, placed at the extremity of a long balance, rise and fall successively. They can only be fixed by moderate sentiments, which are sustained by their own force: any other has a borrowed action, and this action is never in perfect equilibrium with truth.

It is in the nature of revelation, to appear less evident to the mind, in proportion as the proofs of its authenticity are distant: and if, among the dogmas united to a religious doctrine, some one contain a mystic sense—if among the forms of worship adopted, some one be not consonant with the simple and majestic idea which we ought to have of the Master of the world—it would not be extraordinary, that this religious institution, considered in its

different parts, should give birth to controversies: and we should not be exasperated against those, who, after having faithfully examined, still have some doubts. It is in proportion to the extent of our understanding, that God has thought fit to manifest himself to us; thus, the exertion of those faculties of the mind cannot be displeasing to him. But reason, left to itself, and even when improved by philosophy, should, by no means, lead men to any kind of contempt for religious worship in general, or any of the particular opinions, of which Christianity is the support. Any doctrine, which leads to the adoration of the God of the universe, is worthy of the respect of his creatures. Thus, persons most disposed to contest the authenticity of the sacred books, ought still to love precepts which seem to come to the aid of the human mind, in order to assist men in the last efforts which they make to know more of God; as the friendly bark, offered to the forlorn wretch struggling on the surface of the immense waste of waters, on which his feeble hands have vainly endeavoured to support him.

We cannot but have discovered, that the sentiments of gratitude and respect which inspire men, the most capable of reflexion, with the idea of a God, are intimately connected with the Christian doctrines, such as we find them in the New Testament: and in those moments, when, with the desire of happiness, and the timidity which belongs to our nature, we seek to unite our littleness to supreme grandeur, and our extreme weakness to Omnipotence, the divine perfections, which the gospel delineates, encourage our hopes and dissipate our fears. Religion shows us all that we have need of in our miserable condition—a sovereign goodness, an inexhaustible compassion: thus, then, the last link of

the Christian faith, like the termination of the deepest meditations, reaches the same conclusion: and religion agrees with philosophy, in the moment when it is most elevated.

However, the Christian and the Deist unite, in some manner, in the ultimate tendency of their thoughts. They meet, when they throw their attention on civil society, and when they seek to determine the duties of men; for a wise man must ever pay homage to the morality of the gospel, and the philosopher could not have imagined a more reasonable system, or one more conformable to our situation*. If it be then true, that opinions, in appearance opposite, approach at their extremities—and if it be true, that the adoration of a God and respect for morality, form, by uniting, the circle of evangelical doctrines—it very little concerns the reasonable philosopher, that the christian faith is placed between these two grand ideas. If he think he can himself explore the space which separates man from his Creator, for what reason would he condemn with bitterness the sentiments of those who are attached to the comfortable system of intercession and redemption, of which Christianity has laid the foundation?

In short, were they even not to agree in every opinion with the interpreters of the Christian doctrine, this would not be a sufficient reason for breaking the religious alliance which ought to subsist among men; an alliance represented, and rendered authentic, in every nation, by the public worship which has been made choice of by the government. What idea, then, should we have of the genius or the abilities of a

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* I shall offer some reflexions on this truth in another chapter.

philosopher; who, at the sight of the ceremonies of the public worship, which disgust him, could not rise above them, so as to consider them, in some measure, as the atmosphere of religious opinions, which, turning his attention from the importance of those opinions, could not preserve, at least, some respect for all the dependencies of the most sublime and salutary thought? It is easy, however, to perceive, that, for the generality of men, the duties of morality, religion, and all the exterior homage rendered to the Deity, compose a whole so closely connected, that the basis is in danger when the outworks are attacked. The imagination of the vulgar cannot be guided in the same manner as that of the solitary thinker: and it would be committing a great error, to try to influence the opinions of the generality by the same considerations which are sufficient for the man who profoundly reflects: there is a system proportionate to the different faculties of intelligent beings, as there is one applicable to the varied forces of their physical nature.

I know nothing more dangerous than the inconsiderate censures of those religious ceremonies received and respected in the country we live in: some do not think that they are acting wrong, when they speak slightly of the various symbols of public worship; yet, if they attentively observed the kind of minds, and the first habits of the greater part of those to whom they address such discourses, they would know how easy to wound them in the sentiment which is the source of all their tranquillity, and the safeguard of their moral conduct. The deliverer of Switzerland struck off with one of his arrows an apple placed on the head of his only son: but every one cannot expect to be so fortunate.

Some would contradict these assertions, by saying, that celebrated men have occasioned rapid changes in the church of Rome without weakening religion. The origin, the circumstances, and the result of a revolution so marked in history, has not any connexion with the present question. The reformers of the sixteenth century, preaching a new doctrine, openly professed religious zeal and a fervent piety: thus, at the same time that they disapproved of a part of the established worship, they more rigidly recommended all the fundamental opinions of christianity, and sought to introduce a severity of manners, which even extended to the proscription of several indulgences that had not been before condemned: and, in fact, if the new doctrines had not been united to the greatest respect for the essential principles of the Christian religion, they never would have had so many followers.

They cannot, then, establish any kind of comparison between the censures poured forth by the reformers, and the ridicule or contempt of those who now insult our most respectable opinions. Those men, who at present abound, are sometimes excited by a libertinism of mind and conduct, by self-love, or the enthusiasm of false philosophy; and some of them are seduced by an air of superiority, attached to the principles which they themselves institute. There is a great difference between the grave and serious course of the reformers, and the various evolutions of the active opponents of religion. The latter do not take care to stop at clearing up a point of doctrine, or a disputed interpretation of some dogma. It is religion itself that they wish to attack: and if they begin with the outworks, it is in order to undermine it. They take skilfully their post, and know when to have recourse to a tone of pleasantry; which is very dange-

rous, as it gives an air of confidence to those who employ it, and they obtain a kind of ascendancy in avoiding every idea of an equal combat. One is disposed to think, that it is by disdain that they glance slightly over the subject. We submit in a cowardly manner, to the appearance of their superiority: and that, which is in them weakness or impotence, gives consequence.

Men, in order to express their gratitude to the sovereign Master of the world, must borrow from their imaginations every thing grand and majestic: thus, when they detach from those reverential signs the ideas that they represented and preserve, they only display a vain gravity, a chimerical pomp: and it is easy to make a similar contrast a subject of ridicule; but in acting thus, far from making us applaud their talents, they insult, without any sense, the habit most men have acquired, of venerating, on the whole, every system of worship paid the Supreme Being.

Nevertheless, the bold and frivolous discourses which are permitted against religion in general, have made such progress, that at present the persons who most respect these opinions, without ostentation or severity, find themselves obliged to conceal or moderate their sentiments, lest they should be exposed to a kind of contemptuous pity, or run the risk of being suspected of hypocrisy. We are at liberty to speak on every subject, except the most grand and interesting which can occupy men. What strange authority gave rise to this imperious legislation, which is termed fashionable? What a miserable conspiracy, that of weakness against Omnipotence! Men are proud of knowing at what hour the king wakes, goes to the chace, or returns: they are very eager to be informed of the vile intrigues, which successively de-

base or exalt his courtiers : they pass, in short, their whole lives, in panting after objects of vanity and badges of slavery : they are continually brought into conversation : and they proscribè, under the dreadful name of vulgarity, the most remote expression, which would recal the idea of the harmonious universe, and the Being who has bestowed on us all the gifts of the mind. What is most excellent in our nature we overlook, to dwell only on the inflations of vanity. Ungrateful that we are ! Our intelligence, our will, all our senses, are the seal of an unknown power : and, is it the name of our Master and Benefactor that we dare not pronounce ? It is from your modern philosophers, that this false shame arises ; you, who spread derision over the most respectable sentiments, and employing in the dispute the frivolous shafts of ridicule, have given confidence to the most insignificant of men—you have, for your followers, a numerous race, which is taken promiscuously from every rank and age.

We now reckon, among those who oppose a contemptuous smile to religious opinions, a multitude of young people, often incapable of supporting the most trivial arguments, and who, perhaps, could not connect two or three abstract propositions. These pretended philosophers artfully, and almost perfidiously, take advantage of the first flight of self-love, to persuade beginners, that they are able to judge at a glance, of the serious questions which have eluded the penetration of the most exercised thinkers. In short, such is, in general, the decisive tone of the irreligious men of our age, that, in hearing them so boldly murmur about the disorders of the universe, and the mistakes of Providence, we are only surprisèd to see how much they differ in stature from those rebellious giants mentioned in the heathen mythology.

I believe, however, that if contempt for religious opinions did not produce a striking contrast, those, who profess to feel this contempt, would quickly adopt other sentiments. They only superficially attend to the pernicious tendency of their maxims, while they believe themselves still in the opposition: but if they ever obtained a majority, not having then the spur of self-love, they would soon discover the absurdity of their principles, and hastily throw them aside.

There are, undoubtedly, a great number of estimable persons, who highly value the truths and precepts of religion, yet are a prey to doubt and uncertainty, and who become the first victims of the inconsistencies of their minds. But men of such a character do not aim at dominion: on the contrary, they rather wish to be confirmed by the example of those whose confidence is more assured. They would consider with interest the sentiments that unfortunately have made too slight an impression on them: and they would endeavour to strengthen their weak hopes, till they reached the courageous persuasion which inspires the Christian: yes, even the enthusiasm of piety excites their envy; as it is more delightful to yield to the emotions of a lively imagination, than to struggle with apathy against the opinions calculated to diffuse happiness. Thus, if among the number of persons that I have just delineated, there were some to whom nature had granted superior talents, wit, or eloquence, they would carefully avoid exerting them to disturb the repose of those peaceable souls, who calmly rely on religion, and receive all their consolation from that source. A wise man never permits himself to spread sadness and discouragement, in order to gratify the ridiculous vanity of exalting himself a little above common opinions,

or to show his abilities, by making some ingenious distinctions concerning particular parts of the established religion; in the same manner, as it would be the height of folly to stop an army during its march, to discriminate systematically the perfect justness of the different tones of the warlike instruments of music. The bold and frivolous opinions of several philosophers, have appeared to me to be weak, where they most wish to rise; I mean in the extent and loftiness of their views.

I need not speak to those who deny even the existence of a God. Alas! if they be so unhappy as to shut their eyes, and not to admit this resplendent light—if they have a soul so insensible, as not to be affected with the comfortable truths which flow from such a noble thought—if they are become deaf to the interesting voice of nature---if they trust more to their weak reasoning, than the warnings of conscience and sensibility---at least, let them not spread their disastrous doctrine, which, like the head of Medusa, would transform every thing into stone.---Let them remove from us that frightful monster, or let his hoarse hissing be only heard in the dreary solitude, of which their heart presents the idea. Let them spare the human race, and have pity on the distress, into which they would be plunged, if the mild light, which serves to guide them, were ever to be obscured. In short, if they really believe that morality can agree with atheism, let them give the first proof of it, by remaining silent. But if they cannot abstain from publishing their opinions, let a remnant of generosity induce them to inform us of their dangerous tendency, by placing in the frontispiece of their works, this terrible inscription of Dante's: *Lasciat' ogni speranza, voi ch' entrate.*

SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The same subject continued. Reflexions on intolerance.

THE surface of the earth represents to us about the two hundred and fortieth part of the superficies of the different opaque bodies which revolve round the sun.

The fixed stars are so many suns, which, according to all appearance, serve equally to enlighten and fertilize planets similar to those we are acquainted with.

A famous astronomer* has lately discovered fifty thousand new stars in a zone fifteen degrees in length and two in breadth, a space which corresponds with the thirteen hundred and sixty-fourth part of the celestial sphere.

Supposing, then, that we perceive an equal number of stars in every other parallel section of the firmament, the quantity we should be acquainted with, would rise to near sixty-nine millions.

And if each of these stars were the centre of a planetary system, resembling the one we inhabit, we should have an idea of the existence of a number of habitable globes, whose extent would be sixteen or seventeen millions of times more considerable than the surface of the earth †.

NOTES.

* Dr. Herschel.

† It may be said, that the fifty thousand new stars perceived by Dr. Herschel, being the result of observations directed to the milky-way, we are not to expect to discover as great a number in other parts of the heavens of a like extent. But independent of these stars, which Dr. Herschel clearly distinguished, he imagined that there were twice as many more, of which he had only an instantaneous glance. See the philosophical transactions of the royal society, 1774. Dr. H. has probably, since that time, made new discoveries; but they have not reached me. I find, in the transactions of the royal society, of which he is a member, that he considers the new telescope as being still "in its infancy."

How susceptible soever, the ingenious invention, which assists us to explore the vaulted firmament, is of new improvement--and even at the period, when it may arrive at the greatest perfection--the space, which our astronomic knowledge may have taken possession of, will only be a point in the vast extent which our imagination can conceive.

This imagination itself, like all our intellectual faculties, is perhaps only a simple degree of infinite powers; and the images, that it presents, are but an imperfect sketch of universal existence.

What then becomes of our earth in the midst of that immensity which the human mind vainly tries to grasp? What is it, even now, compared with that number of terrestrial bodies we can calculate or suppose?

Is it then the inhabitants of this grain of sand, is it only a few of them, that have discovered the true mode of worshipping the Creator of so many wonders? Their dwelling is a point in infinite space: the life, which they enjoy, is but one of the moments which compose eternity: they pass away, like a flash of lightning, in that course of ages, in which generations after generations are lost. How then dare any of them announce to the present age, and to those to come, that men cannot escape the vengeance of Heaven, if they alter one tittle of the ritual? What an idea they give of the relation established between the God of the universe and the atoms dispersed throughout nature? Let them then raise one of the extremities of that veil which covers so many mysteries--let them consider a moment the wonders on every side, the starry firmament, and the inconceivably dreary immensity which their imagination cannot embrace--and let them judge, if it be by the exterior form of their adoration, the vain

pomp of their ceremonies, that this Omnipotent God can distinguish their homage. Is it then, by the pride of our opinions, that we think to reach the Supreme Being? It is more comfortable, more reasonable to believe, that all the inhabitants of the earth have access to his throne, and that we are permitted to raise ourselves to it by a profound sentiment of love and gratitude, as the most sure and intimate relation between man and his Creator.

Undoubtedly, it is necessary that public worship should be constantly regulated, and that distinct symbols should be respected, whose essential character ought not to vary, that the sentiments of the generality, so promptly affected by exterior objects, may not be exposed to any alteration. It is necessary, that weak minds easily find their way, and that they be not embarrassed with doubt and uncertainty. In short, it is to be desired, that the citizens, united by the same laws and political interests, should be so by the same worship, in order that the sacred band of religion may take them all in; and that principles of education should be maintained and fortified by example. But as morality is the first law of princes, and that always clear and distinct in its motives and instructions, it ought to precede the uncertain combinations of the politician. A government is never permitted to aim at any end by unjust means, let it be ever so desirable: and I believe that this rule is equally adapted to the opinions of men and their rights. It would be possible to conceive a system of distribution, with respect to the fortunes of men, more convenient than any other for the increase of public wealth and the power of the state: but though this knowledge should influence the general conduct of government, it receives no right from its discernment, to arrange, according to its will, the situation

of every citizen. The same principle has greater force applied to opinions : it is reasonable to seek to direct their course by slow and mild means ; but the system of unity, which is certainly most conducive to the happiness of a state, would cease to be good, if, in order to establish that system, violence, or merely constraint, were had recourse to : liberty of thought is the first of rights, and the most respectable dominion is that of conscience.

Some now talk of the union of civil tolerance and religious intolerance. The one protects Protestants in Catholic countries, and Catholics in Protestant countries : and the other would forbid every kind of worship which is not conformable to the institutions of the predominant religion. But upon this plan, if the number of Dissenters were to become considerable, an important part of the nation would be without worship : and the government should not appear indifferent to this ; since it is of great importance to mankind, to maintain carefully every support of morality.

There is nothing more to be said on intolerance, when we consider it in its excess. We all now know what we ought to think of the severities and persecutions which history has transmitted an account of : and we know the opinion we should form of many acts of intolerance and inhumanity which some have for a long time gloried in : and we cannot stifle our indignation at the sight of the faggots that are still lighted round those unhappy wretches scattered over the face of the earth, of whom Jesus Christ himself said, with so much goodness, in the midst of his agonies : "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" It is time to abolish for ever those dreadful customs, ignominious remembrance of our ancient phrensies ! O God, are these thy creatures, that they

dare to torment in thy name ! Is it the work of thy hand, that they sacrifice to thy glory ?---Petty tyrants ! ferocious inquisitors ! do you expect to obtain the favour of heaven, with a heart hardened, after mutilating the members and tearing the bosoms of those whom you can only draw to you by a sentiment of pity—whose emotions you are not acquainted with ? The God of goodness rejects such offerings.---He cannot away with them. Who then will pardon errors, if not men, who are continually deceived ! Alas ! if exactness of judgment, or the perfection of reason, were the only title to divine benevolence, there is not any one who might not cast down his eyes, devoid of all hope.

Those, who proudly flatter themselves, that they alone know the worship agreeable to the Supreme Being lose all their claim to our confidence, when, guided by a spirit of intolerance, they depart so visibly from the character which ought to inspire the idea of a God, protector of human weakness. But the absurd attempt, to inspire faith by acts of rigour and severity, has been so often and so ably combated, that I shall not dwell on a principle, the truth of which common sense will discover. I shall only make one observation, sufficient to intimidate the conscience of inquisitors, and all those who adopt their maxims. The operations of the mind can only be influenced by reasoning : all the designs formed to attain this end by violence, are attempts to subvert the belief of the spirituality of the soul, and indirect associations with materialists ; for we must believe in the identity of matter and thought, to have a right of presuming, that the empire exercised on us by rigorous treatment, can have an influence on our opinions : and then we must consider man as a being governed by mechanical laws, to be able to imagine, that with

instruments of torture we can excite a sensation, which, by an unknown conduit, might act instead of judgment and the sentiment of persuasion.

It is because the indignant emotions of a worthy heart are more powerful than the cool arguments of offended reason, that we rise with warmth against intolerance; for without this motive, it would only deserve our contempt, as indicating a singular littleness of soul. Who can remember without pity, those dissensions so long maintained, in which men, both weak and blind, united in the name of devotion, actuated by self-love, unintelligible decrees, to some important controversy? All these disputes appear foolish when we coolly examine them: and we have only to consider, abstractedly, those quarrels, to discover all their absurdity.

But as it is only by spreading knowledge and diffusing wholesome precepts, that we can hope to cure enthusiasm and intolerance, we ought to be on our guard against the dangerous spirit of indifference; otherwise one evil will be removed only to introduce another equally fatal; when, trying to divert men from fanaticism, we destroy the ideas which served as a foundation for religion. There could not subsist any sound opinion or estimable principle, if the different errors, which creep round them, were torn away by an awkward or violent hand; and if the evil, which continually mixes with the good, became the subject of blind proscription.

Let us loudly acknowledge the benefits which we have received from distinguished writers, who have defended with zeal and energy the cause of toleration. It is an obligation, added to many others, which it is just to acknowledge, that we have received from genius and talents united. But permit us also to observe, that several of those writers have lost

a part of the applause due to them, by seeking to depress religion, in order to succeed in their attempt. Such a proceeding was unworthy of enlightened philosophers, who, more than others, ought to assign limits to reason, and never despair of its influence. What should we think, if, among those who justly attack the tyranny exercised over conscience, there were some intolerant in the defence of toleration—and if we had reason to reproach them with despising, and sometimes hating, those who do not concur with them---and by an inconsiderate imputation of pusillanimity or hypocrisy, make the characters and intentions of those, who do not adopt their sentiments, appear suspicious? What a strange inconsistency, in a different way, do they not exhibit! forgetting, sometimes, their own opinions, and contradicting, without thinking, their acknowledged incredulity, they raise a clamour about the miseries to which mankind are subject, and display the pretended disorders of the universe, in order, afterwards, to throw an odium on the God whose existence they contest, to ridicule a Providence they do not rely on! One would think, that after having overturned the empire of the Deity, in order to remain the only legislators of the world; they regretted not having any longer a rival, and wished to rebuild the temple they have destroyed, to have again a vain idol to insult. Another inconsistency appears in their asperity against those who resist their dogmas, while, in the system of fate, reason does not preserve its empire, and the master, as well as the discipline, are equally subject to the laws of necessity.

To exercise an authority over the mind by the power of eloquence is a great advantage; for such an authority is not confined to any place or time. But to have a right to such an extensive reign, we must re-

nounce fashionable opinions, the councils of vanity and the instigations of self-love; and be only actuated by that universal and durable interest, the happiness of mankind.

I would not wish to prohibit the wise man or philosopher from treating any subject proper to direct our judgment; for there are abuses and prejudices every where, which we cannot destroy without making a step towards reason and truth. But as there is a philosophy for the thoughts, there is one also for the actions. I indeed wish that men of an enlarged turn of mind, who perceive, at a glance, the moral order of things, would attack with more caution and moderation, and at a proper season, that which directly relates to the opinions most essential to our happiness; and that a respect for these opinions should be manifest, even when they censure fanaticism and superstition.

Such a wish is far from being realized: and I cannot help lamenting, when I consider the design of the greater part, who have written for some time past on religious subjects. Some seek artfully to destroy, or, at least, relax the band which unites men to the idea of a Supreme Being: and others, shut up in some mystic idea, as in a dark den, blindly level their anathemas against every kind of doubt and uncertainty; and confound, in their rigorous censures, the accessory ideas with the principal opinions.

However, in taking a course so opposite, they unfortunately have an equal interest in ranking the essential principles of religion with the most insignificant symbols: but, influenced by very different motives, the former act with a view of making religious zeal serve to defend every part of the worship, of which they are the ministers: the latter, guided by a motive of self-love, readily admit confusion, that

they may have an opportunity of undermining religion, when they attack its out-works.

We have need, more than ever, to be directed to religion by wise and moderate discourses, by a happy mixture of reason and sensibility, the true characteristic of evangelical morality. It is only by these means that the authority of salutary truths can be strengthened. We are easily hurried beyond the just line, when the human mind is not in a state to mark any limits: but the daily progress of knowledge obliges us to use more exactness: it is necessary then to rein in the imagination, and to allow reason to take place of it: yet it is still allowed us to animate reason, and even useful to do so; but we must absolutely avoid disguising it. False notions only have need of the assistance of exaggeration. It seems that some are very fond of extremes, that common sense may not investigate them.

I will make another observation. Those who, to free us from superstition, endeavour to relax religious restrictions—and those who, to strengthen them, have recourse to intolerance—equally miss their aim. The hatred, so naturally excited by every kind of violence and constraint, in matters of opinion, creates a repugnance in those persons to religion, who are insensibly led to consider this excellent system as the motive or excuse for a blind spirit of persecution. And the direct attacks against religious opinions engage well-disposed minds to adhere more strenuously to every custom which appears a form of respect or adoration: as we redouble our zeal for a friend, in the midst of those who neglect or slight him.

Let us unite, and it is certainly time, to render to the Supreme Being sincere worship: and let that worship always be worthy of the dignity of our Creator. Let us banish severity and superstition;

but let us equally dread that culpable indifference, the cause of so many misfortunes; and when we shall have strengthened the influence of sound reason, let us adhere more closely to the useful opinions which have been refined from errors, and with all our force repulse those who wish us to hurry our hopes to free ourselves from the wanderings of the imagination. Yes, a religion, disengaged from the passions of men, in its native beauty, ought to dwell with us. Public order and private happiness equally claim it: and all our reflexions lead us to elevate our hearts towards an Omnipotent Being, of whose existence all nature reminds us. Religion, well understood, far from being the necessary principle of rigour or violence, should be the foundation of every social virtue, and of every mild and indulgent sentiment. We are not called to tyrannize over the opinions of others, or to give despotic laws to the mind. We must observe, that a moderate and rational religion only will guide us to the path of happiness and virtue, by addressing equally our hearts and minds.

SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Reflexions on the morality of the christian religion.

I WILL venture a few reflexions on a subject which has often been treated; the course of my subject naturally leads to it. But in order to avoid, as much as possible, what is generally known, I shall confine myself to consider the morality of the gospel, under a point of view which seems to me to distinguish its sublime instructions.

The most distinct characteristic of christianity, is the spirit of charity and forbearance which pervades all its precepts. The ancients undoubtedly respected the beneficent virtues : but the precept, which commends the poor and the weak, to the protection of the opulent, belongs essentially to our religion. With what care, with what love, the Christian legislator returns continually to the same sentiment and interest ! The tenderest pity lent to his words a persuasive unction ; but I admire, above all, the awful lesson he has given, in explaining the close union established between our sentiments towards the Supreme Being and our duties towards men. Thus, after having termed the love of God, "*the first commandment of the law,*" the evangelist adds : "*and the second, which is like unto it, is to love thy neighbour as thyself.*" The second, which is like unto it ! what simplicity, what extent in that expression ! Can any thing be more interesting and sublime, than to offer continually to our mind the idea of a God taking on himself the gratitude of the unfortunate ? Where find any principle of morality, of which the influence can ever equal such a grand thought ? The poor, the miserable, however abject their state, appear surrounded with the symbol of glory, when the love of humanity becomes an expression of the sentiments which elevate us to God : and the mind ceases to be lost in the immensity of his perfections, when we hope to maintain an habitual intercourse with the Supreme Being, by the services which we render to men. It is thus that a single thought spreads a new light on our duty, and gives to metaphysical ideas a substance conformable to our organs.

Justice, respect for the laws, and duty to ourselves, may be united, in some manner, to human wisdom : goodness, alone, among all the virtues, presents another character ; there is in its essence something

vague and indeterminate, which claims our respect. It seems to have a relation with that intention, that first idea which we must attribute to the Creator of the world, when we wish to discover the cause of its existence. Goodness, then, is the virtue, or, to express myself with more propriety, the primitive beauty, that which has preceded time. Thus, the pressing exhortations to benevolence and charity, which we find running through the gospel, should elevate our thoughts, and penetrate us with profound respect. It recalls us, it unites us, to a sentiment more ancient than the world--to a sentiment, by which we have received existence, and the hopes which compose our present happiness *.

But if, from these elevated contemplations, we, for a moment, descend to the political principles which have the greatest extent, we shall find there the influence of a truth on which I have already had occasion to dwell; but I shall now treat it in a different manner. The unequal division of property has introduced among men an authority very like that of a master over his slaves. We may even justly say, that in many respects the empire of the rich is still more independent; for they are not bound constantly to protect those from whom they require services. The taste and caprice of these favourites of fortune fix the terms of their convention with men, whose only patrimony is their time and strength: and as soon as this convention is interrupted, the poor man, absolutely separated from the rich, remains again abandoned to accidents; he is obliged then to offer his labours with precipitation to other dispensers of

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* I think I perceive the traces of these philosophical ideas in the censure Jesus passed upon one of his disciples, who called him, "good master. Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one."

subsistence; and thus he may experience; several times in the year, all the inquietudes that must necessarily arise from uncertain resources. Undoubtedly, in giving the support of the laws to a similar constitution, it has been reasonably supposed, that in the midst of the multiplied relations of social life, there would be a kind of balance and equality between the wants, which oblige the poor to solicit wages, and the desires of the rich, which engage them to accept their services. But this equilibrium, so essentially necessary, can never be established in an exact and constant manner; since it is the result of a blind concurrence of combinations, and the uncertain effect of an infinite multitude of movements; not one of which is subject to a positive direction. However, since to maintain the distinction of property, they were obliged to leave to chance the fate of the greater number of men, it was indispensably necessary to find some salutary opinion, proper to temper the abuses inseparable from the free exercise of the rights of property: and that happy and restoring idea could only have been discerned in an obligation of benevolence imposed on the will, and a spirit of general charity recommended to all men. These sentiments and duties, the last resource offered to the unfortunate, can alone mitigate a system, in which the fate of the most numerous part of a nation rests on the doubtful agreement of the conveniences of the rich with the wants of the poor. Yes, without the aid, without the intervention of the most estimable of virtues, the generality would have just reason to regret the social institutions, which, at the price of their independence, left to the master the care of their subsistence: and it is thus, that charity, respectable under so many different views, becomes still an intelligent and political idea, which serves to

blend personal liberty and the imperious laws of property.

I know not if ever the christian precepts have been considered under this point of view. But reflecting a little on this subject, we perceive more than ever of what importance the salutary institutions are, which place in the first rank of our duties the beneficent spirit of charity, and which lend to the most essential virtue all the force and constancy which religion gives birth to. Thus, at the same time that the doctrines of the gospel elevate our thoughts, its sublime morality accompanies, in some measure, our laws and institutions, to sustain those which are really conformable to reason, and to remedy the inconveniences inseparable from the imperfections of human wisdom.

It is not, however, only to pecuniary sacrifices, that the gospel applies its precepts respecting charity. It extends to those generous acts of self-denial, that religion alone can render supportable; and makes some descend, with a firm step, into the dreary abodes, in which the culprit is a prey to the remorse that tears his heart; and when his very relations have abandoned him, he still beholds a comforter, whom religion conducts to pour consolation into his afflicted soul. The same motives and thoughts induce some to renounce the world and its hopes, to consecrate themselves entirely to the service of the sick, and to fulfil those sad functions with an assiduity and a constancy, that the most splendid reward could never excite. O rare and disinterested virtue, perfection of piety! what a tribute of admiration is due to the sublime sentiment which inspires such painful self-denial! Men are only stimulated by notions of right and justice; it belongs to Christianity to impose duties, whose base is placed beyond the narrow circle of our terrestrial interests. I know not, but it seems

to me, that notwithstanding a diversity of opinions, we cannot help being affected, when we contemplate the sketch of the last day which the gospel delineates. It exhibits a terrific and sublime picture of that day, in which all actions are to be revealed, and the most secret thoughts have the universe for a witness, and God as a judge : and at the moment when we wait to see the retinue of virtues and vices which have rendered men celebrated, it is a single quality, a virtue without splendor, which is chosen by the Divine Arbiter of our fate, to derive an immortality of happiness from : and he pronounces these memorable words, which contain in a small compass our whole duty :—" I was hungry, and ye gave me meat ; " *thirsty, and ye gave me drink. I was a prisoner and ye visited me. Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.*" &c. Men love to contemplate the triumphs of goodness—love to exalt it under different forms. We have so many wants, are so weak, and are able to do so little for ourselves, that this interesting virtue appears our safe-guard and the mysterious tie of all nature.

The spirit of charity, so essential in its exact interpretation, may be applied to the regard and delicate attention that different degrees of talents render necessary. Society, under this relation, has also its rich and poor : and we know the extent of charity and the secrets of our moral nature, when we practise that general benevolence, which preserves others from feeling a painful sentiment of inferiority, and which makes it a duty to respect the veil, that a beneficent hand has designedly placed between the light of truth and those imperfections which we cannot entirely correct.

It is always about the generality of men that the author of Christianity seems to be interested. The gospel takes cognizance of their private senti-

ments, condemning pride, and recommending modesty : and it applies itself to level those distances which appear to us so important, when we only view the little points of gradation which compose our scale of vanity. Religion enables us to discern, that haughtiness and contempt only display our ignorance and folly : “ *What hast thou, that thou didst not receive ? now if thou did receive it, why dost thou glory ?* ” — What is the pride, that does not melt away before these awful words ? Religion seems ever to tend towards the same end, and by continually reminding us of the brevity of life, to prevent strong illusions from engrossing our thoughts.

The greater part of ancient moral instructions were in general addressed, either to man, considered as an individual occupied with the care of his destiny, or to the citizen, connected by his duties to his country ; and none of them had sufficient extent. It is necessary, when giving counsel to a solitary individual, only to try to free him from those passions which would destroy his repose and happiness : and the obligations, that are imposed on the different members of a political state, necessarily participate of a jealous spirit, which the will of the government may turn into hatred. The Christian religion, more universal in its views, turns its attention from the contrariety of interests, which divide men when they belong to different governments. It considers us indistinctly as citizens of a great society, united by the same origin, nature, and dependencies, and by the same sentiment of happiness. Recommending the reciprocal duties of benevolence, the gospel does not make any difference between the inhabitant of Jerusalem and Samaria. It takes man in the most simple and the most honourable of his relations, those which arise from his intercourse, with the Supreme Being : and under this point of

view, all the hostile divisions of kingdom against kingdom, absolutely disappear. It is the whole human race, which has a right to the protection and the beneficence of the Author of nature, and it is, in the name of every intelligent being, that we credit the alliance which unites heaven to earth.

The rich and powerful made the first laws, or, at least, directed the spirit of them. It was especially to defend their possessions and privileges, that they extolled justice. The legislator of our religion, speaking of this virtue, has shown, that the interests of all men were equally present to his thoughts. We might even say, that he made an old obligation a new duty, by the manner in which he prescribed it. "*Whatsoever ye would, that men should do to you, do you even so to them,*" is a maxim ever remarkable, if we consider the extent of the precept which it contains: there are so many acts of severity and oppression, so much tyranny, which escapes the reach of the law, and the superintendency of opinion, that we cannot too highly value its importance. Christianity indeed affords a simple guide and measure for all our actions.

Religion, beside, in order to fix our determinations, strengthens the authority of conscience. She saw, that every one of us has within himself a judge, the most severe and clear-sighted, and that it is sufficient to submit to its laws, to be instructed, in our duty; for it is our hidden thoughts, that this judge examines: and nothing is excused, no subterfuge admitted.

It is not the same with those censures which we exercise towards others: the simple actions only strike us: and the different motives they result from, the emotions, the conflicts which accompany them, and the regret, the repentance, which follow them, all these essential characteristics escape our penetration.

Thus, religion, always wise, always benevolent in its counsels, forbids our forming hasty and precipitate judgments: and we cannot read, without emotion, that lesson of indulgence, so mildly addressed to the crowd, which surrounded the woman taken in adultery, "*he that is without sin, among you, let him cast the first stone at her.*" But how resist being affected by admiration, when we see religion so warmly employed about the fate of those whom the suspicions or false accusations of men have dragged before their tribunals—by declaring that it is better to let a hundred culprits escape punishment, than run the risk of condemning a single person unjustly? This tender anxiety corresponds with every sentiment of our hearts. Innocence, delivered to infamy—innocence, encompassed with all the horrors of an execution—is the most dreadful sight that the imagination can present: and we are so struck by it, that we should be almost disposed to think, that before the Supreme Being, the whole human race is responsible for such a crime; yes, it is under thy protection, O my God, that unknown virtue and injured innocence take shelter. Men turn towards thee for comfort, when pursued by men; and it is not in vain that they trust in that awful day, when all shall be judged before thee.

I wish only to dwell on the particular character of the Christian religion, as it proportions the merit of our actions, not to the grandeur or importance of them, but to the relation that they have with our abilities. It is an idea absolutely new. This system, which presents the same motives and rewards to the weak and strong, remarked the widow's mite, as well as the generous sacrifices of opulence. This system, as just as rational, animates, in some measure, our whole moral nature; and seems to inform us, that a vast circle of good actions and social virtues

are submitted to the same rules, as the immense domain of physical nature, in which the simplest flower, or the most insignificant plant, concurs to perfect the designs of the Supreme Being, and composes one part of the harmonious universe.

The superintendence of the Christian religion extends still further than I can point out ; and, guided by a spirit not to be equalled, it estimates our intentions, obscure dispositions, and internal determinations, often separated from action by different obstacles. It directs men, in some measure, from their first sentiments and designs. It continually reminds them of the presence of God ; warns them to watch over themselves, when their inclinations are but dawning, before they have gained strength. In short, at an early hour, it forms the mind to the exercise of virtue, by discriminating virtue and vice, and reminding us to cultivate a love of order and propriety, before the active scenes of life force those sentiments to appear conspicuously displayed in actions.

But the more the methods of meriting the divine approbation are multiplied, the more essential is it, that our confidence should not be depressed, every instant, by the sentiment which arises from the experience of our errors. It is necessary, that at the moments, too frequent, when the chain which unites us to the Supreme Being would escape from our grasp, the hope of again seizing it should remain with us. It is then to succour our weak faith, that we see in the gospel that idea, at once so excellent and new, that of repentance and the promises which are annexed to it. This noble idea, absolutely belonging to christianity, prevents our relation with the Deity from being destroyed as soon as it is perceived. The culprit may still hope for the favour of God, and after contrition confide in him. Human nature, that singular connexion of the spirit with mat-

ter, of strength with weakness, of reason with the imagination, persuasion with doubt, and will with uncertainty, necessarily requires a legislation appropriated to a constitution so extraordinary. Man, in his most improved state, resembles an infant, who attempts to walk, and falls, rises and falls again : and he would soon be lost to morality, if, after his first fault, he had not any hope of repairing it. Under a similar point of view, the idea of repentance is one of the most philosophical which the gospel contains.

The pressing recommendation to do good in secret, without estimation, is the result of a salutary and profound thought. The legislator of our religion undoubtedly had perceived that the praises of men were not a basis sufficiently steady to serve for the support of morality : and he discerned, that vanity, allowed to enjoy this kind of triumphs, was too dissipated to be a faithful guide. But the most important part of that precept is, that morality would be very circumscribed, if men only adhered to those just actions which all the world might see. There are not many opportunities to do good in public ; and the whole of life may be filled by unseen virtues : in short, from that continual relation with our conscience, a relation instituted by religion, there results an inestimable benefit ; for it is easy to perceive, that if we have within us a clear-sighted and severe judge, this same judge turns consoler and friend every time that we are unjustly condemned, or when events do not answer according to the purity of our intentions : and we believe then, that we have almost two souls, one aiding and sustaining the other on every occasion, in which virtue unites them.

The severe censure of superstition, which we find throughout the gospel, is derived from an idea as

reasonable as enlightened. Men are too much disposed to make their religion consist of little exterior practices, always easier than the conflicts with and triumphs over the passions. Our minds seize with avidity every extraordinary idea : when they are in part of our own creating, they aid our self-love to subjugate our imagination. Man is not, at the age of maturity, terrified by those phantoms, which annoy his infancy : but myteries, occult causes, extraordinary appearances, continue to make an impression on his mind ; and, like the wonders of nature, form too large a circle round his thoughts. It is by ideas more proportioned to his strength, by mere superstition, that he permits himself often to be led captive. We love trivial commands, observances, and scruples ; because we are little ourselves, and that in our weakness we would wish to know every instant the limits of our obligations.

Sometimes, persons terrified by their imaginations, or by the confused picture which they form of the duties of religion, attach themselves to superstitious practices, as a safe-guard near at hand, which may quickly guard them from the different anxieties of their minds. The precepts of the gospel are designed to destroy these dispositions ; for, on one side, they facilitate the study of morality, by reducing to simple principles the entire system of our duties ; and, on the other, they seek to render our intercourse with the Supreme Being more easy, by teaching us, that we may unite ourselves to him by the expansion of a pure mind ; by informing us, that it is not either on mount Sion or Gerizem, that we are to raise an altar ; but that every honest heart is a temple, where the eternal is adored "*in spirit and in truth.*" The christian religion is the only one, which, discarding ceremonies and superstitious opinions, leads us to the worship more consonant to our nature. Christianity,

indeed, in that grand thought, has pointed out the dictates of our conscience as most worthy of respect ---benevolence as the worship most agreeable to the Supreme Being---and all our moral conduct as the most certain prognostic of our future state. There reigns a profound philosophy in the doctrines of the gospel : men have only added a vain pageantry, a more sounding tone.

Let us render homage to christianity, for that sacred tie which it has formed, in uniting, not for a moment, but for the whole of life, the fate of two beings, one having need of support, and the other of comfort. It is religion which refines this alliance, by rendering it immutable, and obliges men not to sacrifice to the caprices of their imaginations the unity and confidence which secure the repose of families, order in the disposition of fortunes, the peaceable education of the succeeding generation : and which, in giving to children, for an example, an union formed by fidelity and duty, implants in their hearts the seeds of the most important virtues. Religion has taught us, that the friendships of a world, in which selfishness reigns, have need of being cemented by that community of interests and honours of which marriage only gives us an idea ; holy union, alliance without equal, which renders still more valuable all the blessings of life, which seems to augment our hopes, and fortify in us the comfortable thoughts and mild confidence to which piety gives birth. The engagements entered into between men, being, for the most part, founded on reciprocal services, a time might come, when our weakness would be so great, (others having no more interest to associate with us) that it might be necessary to find a support in that friendship which time has matured, and of which a sentiment of duty repairs the breaches, and

which acquires a kind of sanctity from the habit and the remembrance of a long and happy union. It is religion, in short, which has ordained, that the delicate virtue, the most excellent ornament of a weak and timid sex, should only be subject to the ascendancy of the most generous and faithful sentiment.

These principles, indeed, are not formed for corrupt hearts. But the service, which religion renders, the end which it proposes, is to assist us to combat our depraved dispositions; it is to point out the errors and the snares of vice; it is to preserve among us, the sacred deposit of principles, which are the foundation of public order, and still maintain some light, to illuminate the path of wisdom and true happiness.

Religion recalls us continually to those universal duties, which we describe under the name of good morals; duties that men would often inconsiderately wish to separate from public interest, but which, however, are bound to it by so many almost imperceptible and secret ties. Every act of wisdom and virtue is not of immediate importance to society. But morality must be cultivated by degrees, and fortified by habit; as it is like those delicate plants which we rear with a kind of fondness to preserve their beauty. If we make a distinction between personal, domestic, and public manners, in order to neglect, as we find convenient, one part of our duty, we shall lose the charm of it, and every day virtue will appear more difficult.

There is, I think, a connexion, more or less apparent, between every thing good and worthy of esteem: and it seems to me, that this idea has something amiable, which confusedly satisfies our most generous dispositions and most comfortable hopes: and if, to sustain a truth so important, I were permitted to interrogate the young man, whose virtues

and talents are the most remarkable in Europe, I should ask him, if he did not experience, that his filial tenderness, the regularity of his domestic life, the purity of his thoughts, and all his rare private qualities, are not united to the noble sentiments which make him appear with so much splendor, as a statesman? But without dwelling on such instances, who has not been sometimes struck with the beauty attached to that simplicity and modesty of manners which we often find in an obscure situation? We then manifestly discover, that there exists a kind of agreement and dignity, I could almost say, a kind of grandeur, independent of refined language, polished manners, and all those advantages due to birth, to rank, and fortune.

I have only glanced over the benefits arising from the Christian religion. But I cannot avoid observing, that we owe to it a consoling idea, that of the felicity reserved for innocent babes; interesting and precious hope for those tender mothers, who see slip from their embraces the objects of their love, at an age when they have not acquired any merit before the Supreme Being, whom they cannot have any relation with, but through his infinite goodness. I feel, that I involuntarily mix with the eulogiums of Christianity a sentiment of gratitude for the mild and paternal ideas which are disseminated with its instructions; and there is something remarkable in those instructions that they are continually animated by every thing which can captivate our imagination, and associate with our natural inclinations. Sensibility, happiness, and hope, are the strongest ties of a heart still pure; and all the emotions, which elevate towards the idea of a God, exalt in our minds the doctrine of morality, which recalls us continually to the sublime perfections of him who was its author.

In short, we cannot avoid admiring the spirit of

moderation, which forms one of the distinct characteristics of the gospel; we do not, it is true, always find the same spirit in the interpreters of the Christian doctrines. Several, constrained by a false zeal, and more disposed to speak in the name of a threatening master, than in that of a God, full of wisdom and goodness, have frequently exaggerated and multiplied the duties of men: and, to support their system, they have often obscured the natural sense, or the general import of the precepts contained in the scriptures; and sometimes, also, collecting a few scattered words, they have formed a body of divinity, foreign, in several respects, to the intention of the apostles and first Christians. Servants always go further than their masters: and as the first thought does not belong to them, they only act by adding something heterogeneous: the spirit of moderation consists, besides, in a kind of proportion, which mere imitators have only an imperfect knowledge of: fortitude is even necessary to impose limits on virtue itself: and, to determine the precise and exact measure of the multiplied duties of men, requires a profound and sublime intelligence. It was by his sublime precepts, that the institutor of an universal morality showed himself superior to that age of ignorance in which extremes reigned: when piety was changed into superstition, justice into rigour, indulgence into weakness: and when, in the exaggeration of every sentiment, a kind of merit was sought for, incompatible with the immutable laws of wisdom. It is by those sublime precepts, in short, that a legislator rose above transitory opinions, to command all times and ages, and that he appears to have been desirous to adapt his instructions, not to the instantaneous humour of a people, but to the nature of man.

We shall, beside, find easily in the gospel several characteristics, proper essentially to distinguish it from

philosophic doctrines : but in an examination so serious and important, I avoid every observation which might appear to the greater number a simple research of the understanding; it is the grand features only which belong to grand things; and any other manner would not agree with a subject so worthy of our respect. I must say, however, that when I am left alone to reflect with attention on the different parts of the gospel, I have experienced, that, independent of general ideas and particular precepts, which lead us every instant to profound admiration, there reigns, beside, in the whole of that sublime morality, a spirit of goodness, of truth, and wisdom, of which all the characters can only be perceived by our sensibility, by that faculty of our nature which does not separate objects, which does not wait to define; but which penetrates, as by a kind of instinct, almost to that love, the origin of every thing, and that indefinite model from which every generous intention and grand thought has taken its first form.

EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Conclusion.

WHAT a time have I chosen to entertain the world with morality and religion! and what a theatre is this for such an undertaking! Only to conceive it, is a great proof of courage. Every one is employed about his harvest; lives in his affairs; is lost in the present instant; all the rest appears chimerical. When I was formerly engrossed by cares for the public welfare, and writing on my favourite subject, I could draw the attention of men by a series of reflexions on their own fortunes and on the power of their country; it was in the name of

their most ardent passions that I engaged them to listen to me. But in treating the subject I have now made choice of, it is their natural dispositions, now almost effaced, that I must address: thus I feel the necessity of re-animating the sentiments which I wish to direct, and giving birth to the interest I desire to enlighten. And when I fix my attention on the actual course of opinions, I fear to have for judges, either men who are indifferent to the subject, or who are too severe in their censures; but the reflexions of vanity are trivial to the motives which have guided me: and provided any of my thoughts have agreed with the inclinations of feeling minds, and added something to their happiness, I shall enjoy the sweetest reward. Such a wish I formed, when, with a weak hand, I ventured to trace some reflexions on the importance of religious opinions.

The more we know of the world, its phantoms, and vain enchantments, the more do we feel the want of a grand idea to elevate the soul above discouraging events, which continually occur. When we run after honours, fame, and gratitude, we find every where illusions and mistakes; and it is our lot to experience those disappointments which proceed from the infirmities or the passions of men. If we leave our vessel in the harbour, the success of others dazzles and disturbs us; if we spread our sails, we are the plaything of the winds: activity, inaction, ardour, and indifference, all have their cares and difficulties. No person is sheltered from the caprices of fortune: and when we have reached the summit of our wishes—when we have, by chance, attained the object of our ambition, sadness and languor are preparing to frustrate our hopes, and dissipate the enchantment. Nothing is perfect, except for a moment; nothing is durable but change.

It is necessary, then, to have an interest with those immutable ideas which are not the work of man, which do not depend on a transient opinion. They are offered to all, and are equally useful in the moment of triumph and the day of defeat. They are, as we need them, our consolation, our encouragement, and our guide. What strength, what splendor, those ideas would soon have, if, considered as the best support of order and morality, men would try to render them more efficacious, in the same manner as we see the citizens of a political society concur, in proportion to their faculties, to promote the welfare of the state? A new scene would open before us: men of learning, far from following the counsels of vanity, far from searching to destroy the most salutary belief of men, would, on the contrary, allot for their defence a portion of their noblest powers. We should see the penetrating metaphysician eager to refer to the common treasure of our hopes, the light which he perceives through the continuity of his meditations, and the perspicacity of his mind. We should see the attentive observer of nature occupied with the same idea, animated by the same interest: we should see him, in the midst of his labours, seize with avidity every thing which could add any support to the first principle of all religions: we should see him, detached from his discoveries, appropriate, with a kind of love, all that tended to strengthen the happiest persuasion and most sublime thoughts. The profound moralist, the philosophic legislator, would concur in the same design; and in such a grand enterprise, men, merely endowed with an ardent imagination, would be like those wanderers, who, when they return home, talk of some unknown riches. There are ways in the moral, as well as the physical world, which lead to unknown secrets: and the harvest, which may be gathered in the vast em-

pire of nature, is as extensive as diversified. How excellent would be the union of every mind towards this magnificent end ! In this view, I represent sometimes to myself, with respect, a society of men distinguished by their character and genius, only employed to receive and place in order the ideas proper to augment our confidence in the most precious opinion. There are thoughts conceived by solitary men, which are lost to mankind ; because they have not had the talent to connect a system. And if those thoughts were to be united to some other knowledge—if they were to come like a grain of sand, to strengthen the banks raised on our shore, the following generations would transmit a richer heritage. We sometimes register with pomp a new word, introduced into the language ; and men of the most exalted genius of the age are called to be present at that ceremony : would it not be a more noble enterprise to examine, to choose, and consecrate the ideas and observations proper to enlighten us in our most essential researches ? One of those researches would better deserve a wreath, than any work of eloquence or literature.

Let us suppose, for a moment, that in the most ancient empire of the world, there might have been priests, from time immemorial, who guarded the deposit of all the original ideas which served to support the opinion of the existence of a God, and the sentiment of the immortality of the soul ; and that, from time to time, every new discovery, calculated to increase the confidence due to these most necessary truths, was inscribed in a religious testament, called the book of happiness and hope : how highly should we value it, and how eagerly desire to be acquainted with it ; and with what respect should we approach the ancient temple, in which those superb archives were deposited. But, on the contrary, could

we imagine another retreat, where the subtle arguments and artificial discourses were collected, by which some endeavour to destroy or shake those holy opinions which unite the universe to an intelligent thought, to a sublime wisdom--and the fate of men to infinite goodness---who among us would wish to enter into that dark abode? who would wish to explore that fatal registry? Let us learn to know our nature better, and, through the delirium of our blind passions, discover its wants. It is a God we feel the want of, a God, such as religion presents; a God, powerful and good, the first source of happiness, and who only can secure it to the human race. Let us open all our faculties to that splendid light, that our hearts and minds may welcome it, and find pleasure in widely diffusing it. Let us be penetrated in our youth, by the only idea ever necessary to our peace. Let us strengthen it when in our full vigour, that it may support us in the decline of life. Ravishing beauties of the universe, what would ye be to us, without this thought? Majestic power of the human mind, astonishing wonders of the thinking faculty, what could it represent, if we separated it from its noble origin? Souls, affectionate and impassioned, what would become of you without hope? Pardon, O Master of the world, if, not sufficiently sensible of my own weakness, and abandoning myself only to the emotions of my heart, I have undertaken to speak to men of thy existence, thy grandeur, and thy goodness! Pardon me, if, lately agitated by the tumultuous waves of passion, I dare to raise my thoughts to the realms of eternal peace, where thou more particularly exhibitest thy glory and sovereign power. Ah! I know more than ever, that we must love thee, we must serve thee. The powerful of the earth exalt and depress their favourites capriciously; there is no relying on them:

after profiting by the talents devoted to them, they forsake the victim, or crush him like a reed. There is in the universe but one immutable justice, but one perfect goodness and consolatory thought: yet we go continually towards other coasts, where we call for happiness, but it is not to be found: there are phantoms there, accustomed to deceive men, who answer when they call. We run towards them, and pursue them, and we leave far behind religious opinions, which only can lead us back to nature, and elevate us to its author. The blind passions of the world, and the devouring desires of fame and fortune, only serve to harden us. Every thing is selfish and hostile in them. Ambitious men, who only wish for a vain name, a childish triumph, acknowledge your features in this sketch. A single object engrosses you; a single end fixes your views: the heavens may be obscured; the earth covered with darkness; and the future annihilated before you; and you are satisfied if a weak taper still permit you to discern the homage of those who surround you. But how is it possible to expect thus to pass a whole life? how be able to retain that homage which appears so necessary to your dream of happiness? how can you make stationary what so many concur to demand? We have a more rational certainty of happiness, when a sentiment of piety, enlightened in its principle and action, softens all our passions, and bends them, in some measure, to the laws of our destiny. Piety, such as I form an idea of, may be properly represented as a vigilant friend, tender and rational. It lets us see the various blessings of life; but it recalls us to the idea of gratitude, in order to augment our happiness, by referring it to the most generous of all benefactors. It allows us to exercise our faculties and talents; but recalls us to the idea of morality and virtue, in order to assure our

steps, and shield us from regret. It allows us to run the race of glory or ambition; but recalls us to the idea of inconstancy and instability, to preserve us from a fatal intoxication. It is always with us, not to disturb our felicity, not to impose useless privations, but to blend itself with our thoughts, and to unite to all our projects those mild and peaceable ideas which attend wisdom and moderation. In short, in the day of adversity, when our strength is broken, in which we have placed our confidence, piety comes to succour and console us: it shows us the nothingness of vanity and worldly illusions. It calms the remorse of our souls, by reminding us of a particular providence. It softens our regrets, by presenting more worthy hopes than any earthly object can afford, in order to engage our interest and fix our attention.

I am not led to these reflexions by a temporary melancholy. I should be afraid of it, if I had not always had the same thoughts, and if the various circumstances of a life, often perturbed, had not led me to think of the necessity of attaching myself to some principle, independent of men and events. Almost entirely alone at this instant, and thrown into solitude by an unforeseen accident, I experience, it is true *, more than ever, the want of those rational ideas, the representations of all that is great; and I approach with renewed interest the truths which I always loved—grand and sublime truths, which I have recommended to men at the moment when I see them more than ever inclined to neglect them. How mistaken are they in their calculations! They trust to-day in the strength of their minds; to-morrow they will find their weakness. They imagine, that in turning their views from the ter-

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*, For I had begun this chapter during my exile.

mination of life, they remove the fatal boundary; but already the hand trembles on the dial, to give the signal of their last moment. What a dire sacrifice we should make, if we gave up those consoling truths, which still present to us a future, when all the bustle of life is over! We should again demand them, search for them with the most diligent anxiety, if ever the traces of them were unfortunately effaced.

All these ideas, some may say, are vague, and do not agree with the humour of the age; but at a certain distance from the field of ambition and vanity, is there any thing, to every one of us, more vague than the passions of others? Are men employed about our interest? Do they dream of our happiness? No; they are like ourselves; they seek for precedence; now and then indeed they pronounce the name of public good; but it is only a watch word, which they have stolen, to be able to run over our ranks without danger. Where shall we find then a real tie? Where shall we find an universal rendezvous, if not in these unalterable ideas, which are so consonant to our nature—which should equally interest us all, being suited to all without distinction—and which are ready to welcome us, when we see the folly of earthly pursuits? They may not, indeed, gratify the childish wishes of the moment: but they relieve our anxiety about to-morrow; they are allied to objects of meditation, which belong to our whole life; and, above all, they unite us to that spirit which constitutes our true grandeur, to that sublime spirit, a few of whose relations only are yet discovered by us, and the full extent of whose power and goodness can be but faintly guessed at by finite beings.

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